ON THE EFFECTIVE USE OF PROXY WARFARE

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Abstract

This dissertation asks a simple question: how are states most effectively conducting proxy warfare in the modern international system? It answers this question by conducting a comparative study of the sponsorship of proxy forces. It uses process tracing to examine five cases of proxy warfare and predicts that the differentiation in support for each proxy impacts their utility. In particular, it proposes that increasing the principal-agent distance between sponsors and proxies might correlate with strategic effectiveness. That is, the less directly a proxy is supported and controlled by a sponsor, the more effective the proxy becomes.

Strategic effectiveness here is conceptualized as consisting of two key parts: a proxy's operational capability and a sponsor's plausible deniability. These should be in inverse relation to each other: the greater and more overt a sponsor's support is to a proxy, the more capable – better armed, better trained – its proxies should be on the battlefield. However, this close support to such proxies should also make the sponsor's influence less deniable, and thus incur strategic costs against both it and the proxy. These costs primarily consist of external balancing by rival states, the same way such states would balance against conventional aggression. Conversely, the more deniable such support is – the more indirect and less overt – the less balancing occurs. This should

outweigh the cost in its proxies' operational capabilities. This dissertation seeks to illustrate that deniability is more important than military effectiveness in achieving a sponsor's strategic goals.

Plausible deniability is the focus in this dissertation because it is the feature battlefield advantage that proxy warfare provides. The other benefits of proxies, such as their cheaper political and material cost than conventional units and the ideological benefit they provide, may have longer-term strategic benefit in a conflict, but only deniability has a direct effect on the forces in the field. That effect is primarily keeping balancing powers out of the conflict; allowing a state to project power into an area without meeting the counterreaction or balancing that it would if it projected power with its conventional forces.

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CHAPTER ONE: RESEARCH DESIGN AND LITERATURE REVIEW

This dissertation asks a simple question: how are states most effectively conducting proxy warfare in the modern international system? It answers this question by conducting a comparative study of the sponsorship of proxy forces. It uses process tracing to examine five cases of proxy warfare and predicts that the differentiation in support for each proxy impacts their utility. In particular, it proposes that increasing the principal-agent distance between sponsors and proxies might correlate with strategic effectiveness. That is, the less directly a proxy is supported and controlled by a sponsor, the more effective the proxy becomes. Strategic effectiveness here is conceptualized as consisting of two key parts: a proxy's operational capability and a sponsor's plausible deniability. These should be in inverse relation to each other: the greater and more overt a sponsor's support is to a proxy, the more capable – better armed, better trained – its proxies should be on the battlefield. However, this close support to such proxies should also make the sponsor's influence less deniable, and thus incur strategic costs against both it and the proxy. These costs primarily consist of external balancing by rival states, the same way such states would balance against conventional aggression. Conversely, the more deniable such support is – the more indirect and less overt – the less balancing occurs. This should outweigh the cost in its proxies' operational capabilities. This dissertation seeks to illustrate that deniability is more important than military effectiveness in achieving a sponsor's strategic goals.

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deniability has a direct effect on the forces in the field. That effect is primarily keeping balancing powers out of the conflict; allowing a state to project power into an area without meeting the counterreaction or balancing that it would if it projected power with its conventional forces. The measurements in this dissertation are mostly focused on that counterreaction: when it comes, how decisive it is, and what delays it.

Deniability causes this delay and degradation of balancing in three ways. First, at its most basic, it clouds the tactical intelligence. All of the cases examined here and indeed most proxy relationships involve a significant amount of secrecy. The relationship between sponsor and client, even if it is acknowledged, usually requires the clandestine exchange of weapons, money, recruits, or some other type of support. This exchange must retain some level of that secrecy for the proxy relationship to work effectively. That is the entire game: that is how a state can convince other states that what looks like a military invasion is actually something else. By the secret nature of these links they are often difficult to parse out, even by sophisticated intelligence operations. The precise nature of Pakistan's support to various Afghan insurgents, for example, was extremely challenging for the US to decipher even with all of its resources and even if strategically it had a fairly good strategic idea of what Pakistan was doing.

This leads to the second way in which deniability helps delay and degrade consequences: it impedes the ability of the balancing state(s) to prove to the broader international community that interstate aggression is being committed. Turning often extremely sensitive intelligence into indisputable bilateral fact is challenging, even for allies. There are also different tiers of states that a balancer must convince, based on the alignment of these other states' interests with the balancer. There are those treaty allies

that are not directly involved in the conflict but share the same basic goals. Like Germany with the US, these states are predisposed to support the balancer but need something more than its assurances. There are also those states that are not party to the conflict nor have much interest at all, but that are nonetheless unwilling to impose costs on a fellow-state without some evidence bilaterally or at the UN. Lastly, there are those states of the opposing coalition that will claim virtually any evidence is faked unless it is so convincing that they become pariahs by continuing to deny it.

Finally, there is a third way in which plausible deniability reduces balancing, and it involves the proxy sponsor itself. Deniability gives both sponsor and balancer(s) the ability to manage escalation in a way that conventional aggression does not. This is as much a benefit for the balancer as it is for the aggressor: as long as the interstate aggression is not too overt, the balancer can decide how much of its resources it wants to commit to countering it, and even decide on none, if necessary, without significant penalty. Proxy warfare thus removes the automaticity of the need to respond to conventional aggression. Any decision to intervene in a conflict and balance proxy aggression becomes a complicated one, particularly if – as in Georgia and Ukraine – both sides include great powers with nuclear weapons. Deniability provides an off-ramp to both parties. The nominal distance between sponsor and proxy allows the balancing state to avoid a confrontation with the sponsor state, and vice versa. In the case of Ukraine, for example, the balancing powers often treated interstate aggression as an intrastate problem, and indeed focused the Minsk process after February 2015 on ethnic self-determination rather than escalate a confrontation with Russia.

The state sponsors in this dissertation's case studies include Iran, supporting the world's Shia malcontents; Russia, supporting ethnic Russians and other marginalized groups abroad; Saudi Arabia, supplying its brand of political Islam to mosques and madrassas around the world; and Pakistan, supporting militants in Afghanistan and India. Two Russian cases are included because they are particularly recent and salient examples of proxy warfare. Of these five cases, according to this proposal, Saudi Arabia should be using proxy forces the most successfully.

The picture is more complicated, however. This thesis relies on the basic assumption that states in the international system will punish interstate aggression. Why they do so – for normative reasons or their own self-interest or the systemic distribution of power – is beyond the scope of this work. Measuring deniability accurately necessitates also recognizing the effect of other factors that delay or cloud state balancing against interstate aggression and thus affect deniability. For example, whether the proxy force is used for defensive goals, how recognized is the interstate border, how delineated are the two conflict areas, impact of a parallel war, and other factors. Overall, the hypothesis appears to hold true for offensive proxy warfare, but results are much more mixed in defensive proxy warfare.

I. Importance

This dissertation is important both to those states that are waging proxy warfare and those that are threatened by it. Its hypothesis is driven by firsthand observation of proxy warfare in the war on terror. Consider: through 2015, the United States spent

about $1.6 trillion on direct funding for its wars in Iraq and Afghanistan.[1] Compare that to insurgent weapons like an improvised explosive device, which cost about $30; or a suicide bomb, available for as little as $5.[2] In the end the Iraq war cost the United States anywhere from $500 billion to $1.1 trillion over its eight-year span and killed nearly 5,000 of its soldiers. Not all of these costs were the result of proxy action, but enough were, particularly as the war ground on and more advanced types of explosives were provided to insurgents. The war did not cost America's opponents nearly as much in dollars, nor in the lives of their own soldiers.[3] A disproportionate body count is unfortunately not an indicator of a failed insurgency. And what they got for that outlay, in the end, was a strategic outcome that was arguably more positive than that of the United States.

America's enemies in Iraq were not, of course, state forces. They were insurgents, like the Shia Mahdi Army's Special Groups or the Sunni al-Qaeda in Iraq. Both were strengthened by outside actors: the Special Groups by Iran, which trained and armed them, and al-Qaeda by Syria, which allowed them free passage across its land. But both groups served state ends: self-evidently, or Iran and Syria would not have helped them. They acted as proxies for these states, neither of which had the strength or the inclination to combat the United States head-on.

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[1] Amy Belasco, *The Cost of Iraq, Afghanistan, and Other Global War on Terror Operations Since 9/11*, RL33110 (Washington, DC: Congressional Research Service, December 8, 2014).
[2] National Commission on Terrorist Attacks upon the United States, Thomas Kean, and Lee Hamilton, *The 9/11 Commission Report: Final Report of the National Commission on Terrorist Attacks Upon the United States* (Washington, DC: National Commission on Terrorist Attacks upon the United States, 2004), 172; Nicholas Ryder, *The Financial War on Terrorism: A Review of Counter-Terrorist Financing Strategies Since 2001* (New York: Routledge, 2015), 23.
[3] "Total violent deaths including combatants, 2003-2013," *Iraq Body Count*, https://www.iraqbodycount.org/analysis/reference/announcements/5/ (accessed June 1, 2017).

But these two groups had very different relationships with their sponsors. Syria's support for al-Qaeda was mostly passive. It did not direct operations in Iraq, but rather tolerated insurgent safe havens on its territory and transported potential insurgents to the Iraqi border. Syria had no long-term interest in seeing its sectarian enemy al-Qaeda gain a permanent foothold in western Iraq, but very much had an interest in seeing America's democratization project fail. It also had an interest in tying down the US on its eastern border and perhaps distract the Bush Administration from its western border where its proxy Hezbollah was struggling to retain control of Lebanon. Iran was more active in Iraq. It provided hands-on training to select fighters as well as advanced weaponry such as explosively formed penetrators that could destroy US armored vehicles. And then there was a third type of support. Thousands of Saudis and other Sunni Gulf Arabs traveled to Iraq to fight the Americans. Millions of dollars followed. They joined al-Qaeda and other extremist groups to conduct guerilla warfare and terrorism against both Americans and their Shia-led government, itself partially backed by Iran.

Who was responsible for the last type of these fighters? They were Sunnis, often from states in the Persian Gulf, Egypt, and North Africa, all from places that were aligned with the US. Most of these states had, to one degree or another, supported the American invasion of Iraq in 2003, but also had varying links with the radicals. Saudi Arabia's state creed was a particularly uncompromising form of Islam which its petrodollars had promulgated throughout the world. It had contributed hundreds of millions of dollars to the Afghan jihad against the Soviets, and in the years since hundreds of veterans of that conflict – many of them Saudis – had traveled to other conflict zones to stiffen the spine of local Muslim insurgents. Along with them had come preachers, mosques, schools, and

charities, which had begun to crowd out other interpretations of Islam such as Sufism in Central Asia.[4] During the 1960's, for example, a tourist could walk through downtown Cairo or Kabul and come across Egyptian or Afghan women wearing miniskirts. The same would be inconceivable today. That change in the culture and norms of a society might be the result of social or ethnic changes, but it has a cause and an effect, and that effect has strategic consequences. And one of the major cultural changes in the world over the past four decades has been an increase in the more stringent forms of Islam, particularly those practiced in the Persian Gulf.[5] And this too had a strategic effect.

Saudi Arabia and Iran are not unique in their influence on the modern world. Americans are more familiar with them since they have influenced the United States' most recent conflicts. But in reality, any and every potential battlefield is constantly changing at the level of the human terrain, the organic fabric of a society from which springs acquiescence or resistance to political control. Any and every state is constantly changing. Russia proclaims its support for Orthodox Greece, Slavic Serbia, Christian Armenia, and ethnic Russians living beyond its borders. The United States proclaims its support for the free peoples of the world, from the Green movement in Iran to the umbrella protestors in Hong Kong. Pakistan stresses its Islamic identity to make common cause with its Islamist rebels, Afghanistan stresses its national identity to counter the transnationalism of the jihadist narrative, and Qatar's Al Jazeera shapes the news to affect the attitudes and dispositions of the Middle East's Sunni Arabs. At any given moment, each nation's human fabric – the thoughts and attitudes of citizens and

[4] Ahmed Rashid, *Jihad: The Rise of Militant Islam in Central Asia* (New York: Penguin Press, 2003), 223-224.
[5] Thomas Hegghammer, "The Rise of Muslim Foreign Fighters: Islam and the Globalization of Jihad," *International Security* 35, no. 3 (Winter 2010/2011): 56-57.

potential rebels – is being tugged in a dozen different directions by a hundred different actors.

That tug-of-war has strategic consequences. The direction the human fabric is pulled affects the efforts of America, Russia, China, Israel, Iran, and any and every other state to exert control over an area. Some countries are more simpatico with certain cultural changes than others, and that affects the resistance they face when they intervene on the ground. That is true whether the behavior of actors is calculated according to some internal adding machine of costs and benefits, or whether it is due to some more nebulous adaptation of new ideas. It is no accident, for example, that Saudi Arabia's troops in Somalia were greeted with less hostility than America's during the events of *Black Hawk Down*. Or take the case of Israel: in the West Bank, Israeli forces obviously faced less armed resistance among its Jewish inhabitants because their ethnosectarian identity is closer to the state's than their Muslim neighbors'. And if governments promote such an idea or an identity, with an expected strategic response from the people, surely that is some type of proxy relationship as well. It may not be as direct or as close as a state-controlled insurgent group like Hezbollah, for example, but surely it is something. Something that makes them effective agents of strategy. More or less effective than Hezbollah or the Taliban? That is what this dissertation sets out to answer.

II. Research Design

Five cases were chosen to represent different varieties of relationships with proxies: that is, they were chosen for variance in the independent variable, which is a sponsor's distance from its proxy. Russia lent the closest support to its Georgian proxies,

then its Ukrainian proxies, then Iran with Hezbollah, then Pakistan with the Haqqani network, then Saudi Arabia with the Chechens.  dissertation will trace out the effect of these relationships on the proxies: it will examine how and when that support affects the sponsor's goals, and what its limitations are.

The case study chapters each have three sections. First, they will provide an assessment of the key features that define that particular proxy relationship. The first section of each case will identify the relevant historical context behind the relationship of the sponsor to the proxy. They examine the range of support that was offered, from financial support and materiel to training, colocation of the sponsor's conventional forces, and military intervention on behalf of the proxy. They will examine other mechanisms of support, such as state assistance given to private individuals and institutions that then support the proxy, as well as the control a sponsor exerts. They will also review ideological links between the two, and analyze the benefit that sponsorship of the proxy offers to the state. All of these features will allow an estimation of how close the principal and the agent are compared to other cases.

Second, these chapters will use process tracing to identify key moments during a defined period when these proxies were used in conflict situations and what made them more or less successful. In particular, international reaction by balancing powers against both the sponsor and the local proxy will be measured, particularly at points when the type of relationship between proxy and sponsor changes. This hypothesis posits that it is the closeness of relationship between proxy and sponsor that incurs increased external balancing against both, which is precisely what proxy warfare is designed to avoid.

Lastly, each chapter will sum up the results of the case and analyze in more detail the proxy's strategic effectiveness in achieving its own and its sponsor's goals. It will also review additional factors that influenced the impact of the support mechanism.

Case selection

The first empirical chapter examines Russia's use of proxies against Georgia with a focus on the period from 2003 to 2008. This represents the period when Georgia's strategic orientation had the greatest potential to change, after the Rose Revolution and until the August War. According to the dissertation's hypothesis, Russia's relationship with the South Ossetians should result in the least effective case of proxy usage. Moscow's proxy forces were closely intertwined with its regular forces, which were Russia's primary mechanism for winning the conventional war when it erupted in August 2008. This chapter first describes the relationship between Russia and its proxies in Georgia, both in terms of Russian materiel support and also ideology. It focuses primarily on the South Ossetians, since they were the most important proxy in the outbreak of the 2008 war. It then lays out the strategic situation in the buildup to the war, including the historical context of the separatist territories in Georgia and the effect of the collapse of the Soviet Union. The bulk of the analysis focuses on the role the South Ossetian proxies played in the rapid increase in hostilities between Russia and Georgia from the Rose  volution and then their war in 2008. This period includes the rise to power of Mikhail Saakashvili, his deteriorating relations with Vladimir Putin's Russia, and Georgia's efforts to join Western institutions. It lays particular emphasis on the months between February 2008, when Georgia was promised eventual NATO

membership, to August 2008, when hostilities between Russia and Georgia began. This is because Russia used its proxies during this period to conduct provocations below the threshold of armed conflict, presenting Tbilisi with a choice of conventional war or a deteriorating strategic situation. The chapter also reviews Georgian opposition to and international balancing of Russia's support of the South Ossetians, before and during the August War. Since the war was primarily fought in South Ossetia, events there are prioritized over those in Abkhazia, though the Abkhazians had a proxy relationship with Russia as well. This chapter concludes with an assessment of the effectiveness of the South Ossetians and the utility they achieved for Russia. This included the setback to Georgia's NATO aspirations, strategic implications of the successful Russian conflict, and the costs Moscow paid.

The second case is also Russian: it examines Russia's use of proxies in eastern Ukraine and the evolution of the crisis between 2013 and 2016. Like with the Georgia case, this is the period when Ukraine's strategic orientation is most variable. This case should represent the second-least effective instance of proxy warfare in the dissertation since Russia's relationship with the Ukrainian separatists was not quite as close as in South Ossetia. Russian regular forces were for the most part not involved as the primary military agent, unlike in Georgia. The chapter's focus is on the war in the east, on the fighting that took place in the Donbas region around the eastern Ukrainian cities of Luhansk and Donetsk. It first lays out the historical strategic context by outlining the start of the Ukraine conflict from the Maidan Square protests in November 2013 to Russia's seizure of Crimea in March 2014. Crimea is less a case of proxy warfare than conventional war; though the invading troops wore no insignia, they were obviously

Russian (though some local provocateurs were involved in fomenting anti-Kiev unrest). The core analysis of proxy usage focuses on the most intense periods of the conflict in the east, from June to August in 2014 and January to February in 2015. This includes countermeasures Kiev employed to recapture territories lost to the separatists, such as a major offensive in June 2014. This chapter also reviews in detail the two critical moments when Russia's relationship with its proxies changed. The first instance came during the weeklong fighting in late August 2014 around the town of Ilovaisk, east of Donetsk, when Russia intervened with conventional forces to halt a Ukrainian encirclement of the separatists. The second moment was during the rebel offensive in 2015 from February 12-18 around the railway hub of Debaltseve, directly between Luhansk and Donestsk, which cut off a brigade-sized Ukrainian force and led to the fall of the town. It then concludes with an analysis of the strategic landscape following the diminution of the conflict in 2016. These included multiple rounds of sanctions on Moscow by both the US and EU, a stalemate in the conflict, a weakened Kiev government, and probably an end to Ukraine's nascent NATO aspirations.

The third case examines Iran's support of its proxy Hezbollah in Lebanon against rival sectarian factions, Israel, and the US-backed Lebanese government. Though it includes a brief review of Iran's formation of Hezbollah, the chapter focuses on the strategic contestation of Lebanon after 2005. This time period is the focus for two reasons. The Rafiq Hariri assassination crisis in 2004-2005 are the years when Lebanon's strategic orientation came into play for the first time since the Lebanese civil war, which was played out under a much different international alignment, with fewer insights for modern policymakers. Second, the Lebanese civil war, the formation of

Hezbollah, and its use against Western and Western-allied forces are all -troweled academic ground, and additional review is comparatively less valuable than on the post-2005 period. The chapter begins by analyzing Iran's support of Hezbollah, from the ideological inspiration to the presence of trainers in the Beqaa' Valley and regular weapons shipments. It traces this relationship and argues that the two were linked closely, but less closely than Russia and the Ukrainian separatists, and more closely than the Saudi and Pakistani proxies. The effectiveness of this proxy relationship should thus be somewhere in the middle. The chapter deepens its focus on Hezbollah and its external support after the assassination of Rafiq Hariri and the subsequent Cedar Revolution until the modern day. After Hariri's death, Iran and Syria's role in Lebanon and relationship with Hezbollah came under intense international pressure. That pressure eventually forced Syria to withdraw its conventional forces from Lebanon, but Iran's forces remained. The chapter reviews in detail Hezbollah's 2006 war with Israel and then the eighteen-month-long Lebanese political crisis over the choice of a new president. Hezbollah and Hezbollah supporters were deployed skillfully to mitigate the 2004 ascension of the pro-Hariri factions, and to support Iranian interests in Lebanon. The chapter then concludes with the escalation of Hezbollah's engagement in the Syrian civil war, particularly its offensive to capture the rebel-held town of Qusayr and the subsequent balancing it incited. Like its entry into politics, the dispatch of armed formations to a foreign sectarian war was a significant change in Hezbollah's relationship with its sponsors. The chapter concludes with a review of the strategic landscape of the war through 2015, by which time the rise of the Islamic State, the entry of Russia into the conflict, the collapse in US and Turkish support for the moderate anti-Assad rebels, and

the power of Hezbollah on the ground put the strategic outcome of the conflict much less in doubt.

The fourth case examines Pakistan's relationship with the Haqqani network from 2005-2016. This period was selected because after 2005 the Taliban insurgency began to pose a systemic threat to the US-led project in Afghanistan and both American and Pakistani involvement in the war increased. The buildup of military forces under President Bush and then the surge under President Obama did not derail either the Taliban's viability or Pakistan's strategic policy in Afghanistan. By 2016, the contours of the conflict had basically been settled. The parameters of the strategic orientation of Afghanistan were much narrower, and the likelihood of a significant change in the war's outcome likewise small. Though Pakistan supported several of the Afghan Taliban groups, such as the main insurgent leadership body in Quetta, it had the closest ties to the insurgent faction linked to the Haqqani family. Comparatively, however, this relationship was not as close as Russia's ties to the Ukrainian separatists or Iran's with Hezbollah, and the Haqqanis should thus have been more effective as a proxy. The chapter begins with a review of the Haqqani network's historic ties to military, intelligence, and civil organizations in Pakistan. Throughout the Soviet war and indeed into the modern Afghan war, Pakistan provided the Haqqanis with two forms of support: both directly, through its intelligence and military links, and indirectly, through its civil-society decades-long promotion of jihadism through mosques and other civic outlets. The chapter then examines the Taliban's strategic resurgence in Afghanistan in 2005 and the worsening insurgent violence from 2006-2009, including several high-profile attacks attributed to the Haqqanis. It ends with the end of the NATO mandate in Afghanistan in

2014 and the establishment of regular multilateral peace negotiations in 2016. The chapter also reviews the incumbent government's countermeasures to this proxy warfare, including the American surge of troops in 2010 and the Obama Administration's diplomatic pressure on Pakistan to cut ties with its proxy. In addition, it further examines the blowback effect of Pakistan's promotion of jihadism within the tribal areas and Pakistan proper. This was clearly a feature, not a bug, of more indirect support and less control of proxies. While the explosion of militancy in Pakistan during these years was not monocausal, it was partially fed by the mechanisms Pakistan has established to support exportable jihadists for strategic reasons. This covers a significant amount of time and events. However, it is impossible to assess the cost and benefit of the Haqqanis as a proxy without including the effect of that support on the sponsor.

The fifth case examines Saudi Arabia's relationship with the Chechen rebels from 1996-2003. Riyadh's roundabout support for the Chechens was the most deniable of any of the cases included here, and accordingly should have been the most effective. Several of the Kingdom's top political officials and civil society leaders made statements in support of the Chechens in their fight against Russia, and financial and cultural ties were established with the Chechen government. However, Saudi Arabia's primary support was not direct state assistance. Instead, it was provided by civil society institutions similar to Pakistan's that provided a ready supply of Saudi militants and money to the Chechens throughout their conflicts with Russia. The Saudi government consciously supported these institutions and these outcomes through a variety of intentional policy decisions. The chapter begins by reviewing these historic policies, including the rise of the Afghan Arabs. It then offers some historical context for the Chechen conflict leading

up to 1996, including the conclusion of the first war. Next, the case analyzes the changing character of the Chechen state during its three years of independence, as the influence of radical Islamic figures grew and that of secular, Soviet-era leaders shrank. It examines the beginning of the second Chechen war in 1999 and the subsequent Russian invasion and occupation of Chechnya. This includes the changing nature of the conflict, from semi-conventional warfare to guerrilla warfare (which had predominated in the first Chechen war) and then modern mass-casualty Islamic terrorism. It concludes with the 2003 political settlement imposed on Chechnya by Russia, culminating with the ratification of a new constitution and the installation of pro-Russian leader Akhmad Kadyrov as the first president of the Chechen Republic. Though high-profile terrorism continued in Russia, and Kadyrov was assassinated less than a year later, Moscow's control over Chechnya after 2004 was no longer seriously in doubt.

Parameters and Limitations


inctions between the sponsor states in size, ideology, risk tolerance, and other factors unavoidably increase the variance in the factors affecting the outcome of each case and reduce the significance of the independent variable, the different types of support each state lends to its proxy. However, that increased variation is the result of the two additional parameters imposed on this study: modernity and relevance. This study is intended to be a modern assessment, dealing with states that are using proxy warfare in the modern day under the current international system. That should increase its applicability to policymakers, particularly in states threatened by proxy war. However, the number of potential cases is by definition smaller than if a longer time horizon was

used, which would allow identifying cases with variance in their types of support while holding constant more of the other variables – ideally, all of them. However, this dissertation's focus on modernity was judged to outweigh the limitations on the statistical significance of its results.

The parameter of relevance imposes similar limits. The cases selected here are intended to meet some baseline level of relevance to modern geopolitics and policymakers, especially American ones. They should have some import to the major choices facing states and their national policy narratives today. It is quite possible that the research model would be strengthened if sponsor states were selected to be as homogenous as possible, regardless of size or power or geographic location. This might have resulted in a dissertation limited only to South America, for example, or to five states of the Caucasus, or even to five ethnic groups within one state. But it disproportionately limits the utility of this study if the size and relevance of the various geopolitical actors are  red. For most modern states invested in the current international order, particularly the United States, it is of crucial importance how regional and global competitors like Russia, Pakistan, Iran, and Saudi Arabia support proxies. The statistical weakness this parameter imposes on the study is thus outweighed by the applicability of the analysis and results to modern policymakers.

There are other challenges with this case selection. In some ways, they are not different enough. One of the clearest commonalities among these five cases is that they are all authoritarian regimes of different stripes. This is another result of the dissertation's stress on modernity and relevance. The disproportionate proliferation of proxy warfare among modern authoritarian states is a function of several factors, but

primarily the conventional military overmatch of the United States and its own support for liberal democracy. This means that regional opponents of the current US-led international status quo and American strategic rivals are all authoritarian states that seek to avoid a direct conflict with the US and its allies when projecting power beyond their borders.

There are certainly cases in the past of liberal democracies sponsoring proxy warfare: for example, the United States support for UNITA in Angola, or the Cuban exiles in the Bay of Pigs, or Hmong partisans in Laos, or different shades of proxy in Syria. But with the exception of Syria these cases were all during a period with a much different international alignment than today. The United States was matched with a rival power, the Soviet Union, that was roughly its material equivalent, and both were competing for global influence without provoking a conventional war. The modern paucity of democratic support for proxies looks even scarcer when one considers that the only recent full-throated American support for a proxy came with the Kurdish Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF), which primarily fought against the Islamic State, another nonstate actor, and not a state power. This type of conflict is best categorized as one of a substate group versus another substate group. It has less application to this dissertation and its focus on state-to-state competition because many if not most of the penalties for interstate aggression in the SDF-versus-Islamic State case do not  y.

Changes to the international system have reduced democratic support for proxies in two ways. First, the United States and its allies became less concerned militarily about escalating to conventional warfare, in which they have had a significant military advantage for the past thirty years. The invasions of Afghanistan and Iraq, the multiple

wars against Serbia, and the expansion of NATO and NATO-adjacent relationships deep into the former Soviet space would all be unthinkable under the former bipolar system. Even the Syrian case is not dispositive: certainly the Obama Administration's parsimonious aid to the Free Syrian Army (FSA) reflected its political reluctance to enter a new war in the Middle East, having recently withdrawn from Iraq, but not fear of escalation by another power, at least in the critical years of 2012-2014. Even with the FSA, the United States was confident that it could have military superiority in a conventional conflict if it wished to pay the price. Thus, states that sought to challenge US power adopted strategies that avoided direct confrontation or conventional warfare in favor of those that delayed a US response, obfuscated their own role, and minimized other international reactions – reactions that, if they came militarily, could be disastrous.

Second, the redistribution of power from a bipolar system to a borderline unipolar system after 1991 meant that the parameters of behavior and regime type the United States would embrace also changed. Promotion of American values abroad has been a core tenet of the United States foreign policy for at least over a century, and a comfort with fellow democracies and fellow republics for even longer. In practice these policies and norms have not always been applied evenly, especially in areas of intense geopolitical competition like the Middle East or South Asia where short-term interests often outweigh the long term. But after the end of the Cold War, these needs became fewer, particularly in places like South America and Africa. Regimes and regime actions that the United States tolerated in the fight against communism became more problematic after that fight ended. US support for nonstate proxy groups, many of them also morally

problematic, declined as well.[6] Whether this was itself the case of a strengthening democratic norm after 1991 or simply a reduction in such groups' utility to the US in a unipolar world is less important than simply that there was a decline. This meant that the remaining cases of proxy sponsorship, rather than being a tool that both sides used during the height of the Cold War, became primarily a tool for autocratic states.

There was thus a confluence between a US unwillingness to support problematic agents and an unwillingness on behalf of autocratic states to challenge the military power of the US-led order directly. With few exceptions, the most compelling modern examples of proxy warfare come from autocratic states, not democratic ones, and have as such influenced the case selection by necessity.

How did that impact the results of each case? Potentially in several ways. First, structurally, the balancing group in question that opposed the proxy sponsor was usually the same constellation of states. In four of these cases, the proxy sponsor in question was projecting power against the United States and some collection of European states, their agents, their ally, or their partner. Only in the fifth case, in Chechnya, did an autocratic power project influence against different competitors, though importantly one of which (the Russian government) that still significantly outmatched it militarily. This had a sequential effect that might have muddied the case results. Since the balancers were usually the same group of states and the events are not synchronous, they might well have learned from one crisis to the next. There is an argument to be made that the United States was more attuned to Russian danger signals in Ukraine than it was in Georgia six years earlier. Certainly European states reacted more assertively to Russian

[6] Daniel Byman, Peter Chalk, Bruce Hoffman, William Rosenau, and David Brannan, *Trends in Outside Support for Insurgent Movements* (Santa Monica: RAND, 2001), xiii.

aggression in 2014 than they did in 2008. The same stimuli might well have had a different impact case-by-case, all other things being equal.

Since the same group of states was usually the balancing coalition, the results also might be biased by their national interest. The United States had more of an interest in the Afghanistan war than it did in Georgian sovereignty, and would have likely reacted more strongly to provocations in one versus the other even if the independent variable were not different. The same was true for European states, which were much more interested in conflicts closer to home than in Afghanistan even though many of them had contributed troops there. This was mitigated somewhat by the fifth Chechen case, but remained an enduring challenge. The best overall remedy was first, by measuring correlations between changes in deniability and changes in reaction, and second, by examining conflict events through a tactical and operational lens and measuring tactical and operational changes. Aggression on the battlefield would theoretically incite a reaction in a sort of "black box," without strategic leadership being invited to immediately change policy. In addition to tactical responses, this challenge is why this dissertation takes a close look at what balancing states were saying. There is far more gradation available in the statements that governments made than there were with binary policy choices. And those statements happened far more often than proactive policy choices. Governments have to say something about a growing problem, even if they are able or desire to put off a strategic decision until later. How that language changes is an indicator of changes in how egregious they judge proxy aggression to be. National interest thus sets a baseline level of balancing, which then changes as sponsor and proxy act. The changes can be measured and the effectiveness of proxy warfare assessed even

if the baseline level of engagement is particularly low or particularly high as the result of some exogenous level of national interest.

The autocratic nature of sponsors also poses an efficacy problem when assessing how effective their proxy wars could be. Democratization is fiendishly complicated, particularly in the developing world with the other crush of social problems for a new government or counterinsurgent to manage. It is harder to build a democratic state in regions of the world that have little experience with democratic norms than it is to create an autocratic state or especially an autocratic enclave. In the middle of a conflict, those challenges grow exponentially. This means that forces with limited military effectiveness like militia proxies can have an outsize impact on nascent democratic regimes. As a democratic tool against autocratic regimes, even fighting for control of an enclave, the task would be far greater to both win the conflict and establish a newly democratic government. With all of its power and influence, the United States itself has an extremely mixed record on such projects. Proxy forces, almost no matter the amount of support, would be exceptionally challenged to do likewise, and thus their impact is probably greater when used by autocratic regimes than democratic ones.

Does this limit the applicability for the United States and other democratic powers as potential proxy sponsors? Yes, certainly. To start with, autocratic regimes are more tolerant of forces that have broader left and right limits on their standards of behavior. The United States would have great trouble legally, politically, and morally, supporting a proxy that committed widespread human rights abuses. The Russian and Iranian governments would have little trouble doing so. The military forces of autocratic regimes arguably behave more badly in combat than democratic governments. Since there is by

definition less control over proxy forces by the sponsor government, and thus less control over their behavior, such human rights abuses are almost inevitable in a combat zone. This limits their utility for liberal democratic powers, which have far less ability to tolerate such abuses.

Sometimes such human rights abuses are not just inevitable but actually encouraged. This is another point where proxy forces are more effective for autocratic states than democratic ones. Terror against the civilian population is a tactic with which most autocratic states are comfortable and even rely on to a certain degree. Proxies, with their low cost and veiled ties to the state, are ideal for these actions. Human rights abuses also have a combat effectiveness if exacted correctly. There is a strong argument that Russia was successful in keeping the peace in Chechnya after the second war partly because of the long reign of terror Chechen leader Ramzan Kadyrov enacted against his population on Russia's behalf. The more deniable nature of proxy forces can make them effective tools for maintaining order through terror. But this same quality makes them less effective and less suited for use by democratic nations.

The human rights question, however, does not *a priori* answer which type of regime needs more control over its proxies. There is an argument that autocratic governments need less control, since they are less troubled by proxy human rights violations that would be potentially show-stopping for democracies. But there is the opposite theory as well. Governments that exert widespread, oppressive control over the lives of their citizens often find it difficult to avoid exerting similar control over the actions of their proxies. Witness, for example, the close control the Soviet Union sought to exert over many of its proxy communist forces in places like Spain and later the

Eastern bloc nations. Since the result of democratic proxy support is theoretically the construction of a new democracy, Western states might well be more comfortable with those proxy forces taking a more independent role with local decision-making. Indeed, this was the result of US support for Kurdish factions in Iraq's north during the 1990's, for better or worse. Since exerting control costs resources and increases friction with the proxy, the least amount of control necessary to achieve the sponsor's goals is the most optimal.

There is a further wrinkle to the issue of regime type. The primary ideology for each of the sponsors in this dissertation is based on an ethnic or religious identity. This is true even in the examples of Iran and Pakistan, both of which make claim to be non-sectarian. This ideology impacts their proxy war in three ways. First, like any ideology, it helped set the state's strategic goals. The Islamic Republic's goals, for example, were radically reshaped by its revolution and the change in its ideology. Iran moved out of the US-led regional balance of power and began to challenge it, building its influence in the Shia community in places like Lebanon that the Shah had abjured. Second, such ideologies help pre-identify potential proxy communities. Ethnic Russian communities beyond the borders of the Russian Federation were ideal potential proxy agents for the state. Not only did the state derive some endogenous ideological benefit from supporting its ethnic kin, the condition of these Russians was a cause that potential balancers recognized as legitimate to a certain degree. Russian involvement in their protection, including military involvement, was considered more legitimate by the international community than naked Russian military aggression. It was not only ethnic Russians, either, that Moscow could reach out and touch. Minority populations like Ossetes that

spilled over into neighboring states could also be effective agents, if Moscow could claim they are suffering discrimination. This conflating of minority rights and ethnic unrest helped muddy international balancing against military aggression, effectively turning interstate conflicts into intrastate conflicts.

Lastly, an ethnosectarian ideology could affect the feasibility of creating support networks to proxies. The existence of ethnosectarian institutions could provide more efficient and more effective pathways from sponsor to proxy, ensuring that weapons, money, and recruits reached the proxy and it became a more operationally capable agent. The impact of this effect would depend on how intertwined a political ideology was with the current social structures and extant pathways within a society. The networks of jihadist madrassahs in Pakistan, for example, were supported and expanded under General Zia in the 1970's and 1980's. By the time of the US conflict in Afghanistan, they were extremely effective at fomenting a base of militancy from which the Taliban could effectively reconstruct itself in the years after the invasion. Russia had to create ties to its proxies largely from scratch, beginning in the mid-2000's. Remaining Soviet-era links to former member republics or Russian language heritage clubs did exist, and Vladimir Putin in places sought to expand them. But they were less organic and more recent than Iran or Saudi Arabia's ties to potential proxies, making them less cost effective. Perhaps as a consequence those proxies were never as effective fighting units as the agents in the other cases. An ethnosectarian ideology could also be more motivating, at least for enacting violence in the national interest. Iran, for example, has since the revolution maintained an anti-Western ideology that was also distinctly Shia, which mixed in themes of martyrdom and military heroism that evoked the Caliphs

Hussein and Ali. This could be an effective (and lower cost) motivator for the Shia population in places like Lebanon, and easily fitting together themes of improving the life of Shias with calls to sacrifice militarily.

Democratic states are possibly less easily able to motivate fighters to rally around a concept like representative government, particularly if the element of nationalism is left out. How intertwined is the United States' political ideology with its society and potential proxies abroad? Or, for example, the United Kingdom's? There are certainly a wide array of Western NGOs that support pro-democracy groups and civil society abroad, and financially these pathways can be used to send support to proxies. But there are significant limits on these, in the amount of government involvement possible, the range of actors that can be supported, and above all in the type of support that can be offered. Few policymakers in the United States aim to use the Ford Foundation, for example, to supply arms to pro-democratic groups overseas. Thus the particular brand of autocratic ideology that autocratic states use to justify their repression, especially conflict-oriented themes, can make proxies a more useful and effective tool for them than for their more democratic rivals. This probably lowers the cost of proxy sponsorship and conversely exaggerates the relative military effect.

There are also clear-cut opportunities for democratic states, however. Western appeal to nonstate actors is, theoretically, ecumenical, and so is much of the support that can be offered. Protestors against the authoritarian regimes that constitute virtually the entirety of Western opponents will look to the United States and Europe for support and inspiration. This is an advantage that autocratic powers' use of ethnic nationalism and sectarian messages do not have. For example, there is immediate ideological kinship of

protesters in Hong Kong with their former colonial power and the United States. Where there is injustice, where there is oppression, most subjugated peoples look to the free societies of the West. In Syria, the Free Syrian Army was an important umbrella group for the opposition in a country that has not had significant governmental relationship with the United States for eighty years. During the Cold War, civil society and dissidents in communist countries often looked to the United States, even in places and communities that had little contact with it. Certainly, autocratic states are ideologically supple as well. They can and will supply aid to ideologically strange bedfellows, such as Iran's support for Hamas or Venezuela. Regardless, the initial ideological kinship of most revolts against an authoritarian government with the democratic West is a significant opportunity for the US and its allies to spread their influence.

There are other similarities that limit applicability in this dissertation. Three of the five cases involve Russia, on one side or another, and three involve Islamic nations. This is partially another necessity of relevance: there are only a limited number of modern states that are using proxies. In a qualitative study, with a limited sample size, there will almost certainly be some overlap. There are also different types of Islam practiced in these countries. The Islam of Sunni Saudi Arabia is different than that of Shia Iran. Fighters who flock to support Sunni causes in Chechnya or Afghanistan would never go to Lebanon, except to fight against Iran's own proxies. The potential bias of Islam as a hidden variable is thus real, but somewhat mitigated by Sunni/Shia differences.

In addition, two of the "more remote" proxies examined – Saudi Arabia and Pakistan – produce militants from Islamic institutions that are similar and partially intertwined. The Haqqani mosque and other Islamic organizations in Pakistan that raise

money from the Persian Gulf do so from similar sources as Chechen jihadist organizations. This means that the effect and the balancing in each case might be corrupted by the same exogenous effects, leading to a biased result. However, Pakistan also gives an identifiably different level of active state support to some of its militant groups than Saudi Arabia. The effect of these fighters as a policy tool should thus be different.

These cases also represent different time periods. The Ukraine case is the shortest, at barely three years. The Pakistan case is longest, at eleven years. Comparing the results could potentially be problematic, since they reflect different time frames. This issue can be mitigated in two ways. First, where appropriate, smaller time segments of more intense combat and action-and-response between the sponsor and its balancers are broken out of longer duration case studies for closer study. Though they do not constitute entire cases in themselves, they can be helpful in comparing, for instance, the effect of Iran's proxy Hezbollah and Russia's proxy the South Ossetian militias in the July 2006 and August 2008 wars respectively. Secondly, it is part of the nature of these proxies that some effects are felt over longer periods of time. Both Saudi Arabia and Pakistan created civic institutions to support a more indirect form of proxy – Islamic extremist groups – that necessarily had more gradual effects over a longer time horizon than Russia's proxies (so far). The different time horizons are necessary for measuring the full impact of the more indirect use of proxies. They are thus a feature, not a bug.

Lastly, most of the research supporting this dissertation comes from secondary sources like think-tanks and academic publications. For some cases such as the Ukraine and Syria conflicts, research also comes from news accounts and social media, since the

events are very recent and currently unfolding. To the extent possible, identifiable bias in certain media coverage has been balanced by other media. For some of the most recent information about tactical events, however, such as the mid-February 2014 fight for the critical town of Debaltseve in Ukraine, few sources exist and even fewer in English. The variety of sources in certain cases is thus limited and potentially biased. Broadly, mostly English-language media and sources were used, which is also a source of concern. English-language news outlets might well be more pro-Western than foreign sources. This has been mitigated, where possible, by using English-language sources from neutral countries or countries antagonistic to the United States. Primary-source material is also used. This consists of parliamentary testimony and public statements, both in the US and abroad. Again, the English-language bias exists.

III. Literature Review: The who, the why, and the how of proxy war

Proxy warfare in history

Proxy warfare as a standalone concept remains a broadly under-studied phenomenon, though that has begun to change over the past three years.[7] The study of indirect warfare entered the international relations literature during the Cold War, and then after a brief interregnum the War on Terror, both of which served to frame and color it. It emerged alongside studies about the rise of intrastate conflict and the decrease of interstate war after 1945, as the costs of the latter rose and insurgents became much more

[7] Tyrone Groh, *Proxy War: The Least Bad Option* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press), 5; Andrew Mumford, *Proxy Warfare* (Malden: Polity Press, 2013), 1-2; Philip Towle, "The Strategy of War by Proxy," *The RUSI Journal* 126 (1981): 21-26.

difficult – and expensive – for states to defeat.[8] Rebels started winning their wars for a variety of reasons. The colonial powers that supported most of the incumbent governments had lost legitimacy during decolonization, thus facing an increased cost of maintaining their hold on colonial possessions as local populaces stopped cooperating.[9] These conflicts were also asymmetric: their stakes were enormous for the rebels, and much less for the empires, which made defeat easier to bear.[10] There were technological developments that made individuals more deadly, like the popularization of the AK-47. Environmental factors may also have played a role: perhaps the closer insurgents were to the state's border, the stronger they became.[11] But one particularly powerful factor that strengthened rebels in civil wars was the support of the superpowers. Both the US and USSR were circumspect about risking head-to-head clashes, and often relied on proxy forces to do their fighting for them.[12]

It was tremendously cost-effective for the superpowers to pay another entity – insurgents, state forces, or whomever – to fight for them.[13] States could avoid (or at least limit) the domestic costs of unpopular interventions, or obviate the need for legislative approval.[14] There could be ideological benefits to supporting proxy forces, which could

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[8] Martin Van Crevald, *The Transformation of War: The Most Radical Reinterpretation of Armed Conflict Since Clausewitz*, (New York: The Free Press, 1991), 28-29.
[9] Stathis Kalyvas and Laia Balcells, "International System and Technologies of Rebellion: How the End of the Cold War Shaped Internal Conflict," *American Political Science Review* 104, no. 3 (2010): 415-429.
[10] Ivan Arreguin-Toft, "How the Weak Win Wars: A Theory of Asymmetric Conflict," *International Security* 26, no. 1 (Summer 2001): 104-106, 122.
[11] James Fearon, "Why Do Some Civil Wars Last So Much Longer Than Others?" *Journal of Peace Research* 41, no. 3 (2004): 277.
[12] Kalyvas and Balcells, 416; Odd Arne Westad, "Rethinking Revolutions: The Cold War in the Third World," Journal of Peace Research 29, no. 4 (November 1992): 455-464; William Mott, *Soviet Military Assistance: An Empirical Perspective* (Westwood: Greenwood, 2001).
[13] Bruce Hoffman, *Inside Terrorism* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1998), 258;
[14] Geraint Hughes, *My Enemy's Enemy: Proxy Warfare in International Politics* (Portland: Sussex Academic Press, 2012), 22-23; Groh, 86-90.

bolster a regime's legitimacy with its citizens domestically and fellow-travelers abroad.[15] An otherwise unpopular, underperforming government could gain legitimacy through the struggle, much like Syria's ruling Assad family has benefited from being the standard-bearer of radicalism in the Arab-Israeli conflict. Another reason states employed proxies in warfare – the one focused on in this dissertation – was plausible deniability.[16] Supporting these proxies ran less of a risk of incurring international costs, such as sanctions or worse. Taking no official part in hostilities between states reduced the potential magnitude of the conflict, escalation, and likelihood of retribution.

On the flip side, it was easy to see what the ragtag proxies got out of state sponsorship. Governments were powerful allies for rebels, and still are. They could supply fighters with materiel, funding, and training. They could also protect their proxy in a variety of ways. Adjacent states could provide safe havens, a space in which insurgent fighters could refit and regroup. They could ignore things, like large groups of armed men moving through their territory. They could also provide strategic deterrence, preventing their proxies' enemies from taking drastic countermeasures. Communist ideology, like a uniting ideology of any kind, also played an important role. Third-party ideas like communism or Islamism could provide a worldview and identify strategies for the expression of discontent.[17] They could also motivate rebels to take risks in pursuit of

[15] Daniel Byman, *Deadly Connections: States that Sponsor Terrorism* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 48.
[16] Daniel Byman and Sarah Kreps, "Agents of Destruction? Applying Principal-Agent Analysis to State-Sponsored Terrorism," *International Studies Perspectives* 11 (2010), 6.
[17] Judith Goldstein and Robert Keohane, "Ideas and Foreign Policy: An Analytical Framework," in *Ideas and Foreign Policy: Beliefs, Institutions, and Political Change*, ed. Judith Goldstein (Cornell University Press, 1993), 8.

their goals.[18] State sponsorship could also improve rebels' tactics and weapons, bolster their political messaging, and extend their organization.[19]

Not all of the proxies supported by states during this period were insurgents. They also supported third parties to conflicts, like the Autodefensas Unidas de Colombia (AUC) in Columbia, and terrorists, like the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO). The Soviet Union and its allies supported a wide array of terrorist groups, such as Abu Nidal and the Baader-Meinhof gang. Along with intrastate war, the number of perpetrators and acts of international terrorism coincidentally rose after 1945.[20] Of course, these categories of proxy are not neatly delineated. A guerilla force could also use terrorism to advance its cause, like Hezbollah or the Fuerzas Armadas Revolucionarias de Colombia (FARC) or the Viet Cong. Some theorists viewed terrorists and guerilla movements as existing on a spectrum of insurgency, with rebels adopting one method or another over time as their strength waxed and waned.[21] Different types of proxy forces could have different strategic effects, both for themselves and for their sponsors. Terrorists could offer different capabilities than a guerilla movement, and guerrillas could offer different capabilities than regular military forces. Certainly, they could serve similar goals, such as disorienting the enemy, eliminating opposing forces,

[18] Jeanne Kirkpatrick, "Protracted Conflict and US Policy," in *Guerilla Warfare and Counterinsurgency: US- Soviet Policy in the Third World*, eds. Richard Shultz, Robert L. Pfaltzgraff, Uri Ra'anan, Willam Olson, and Igor Lukes (Lexington: Lexington Books, 1989), 7.
[19] Ilya Dzhirkvelov, "Political and Psychological Operations in the Soviet Promotion of National Liberation Movements," in *Guerilla Warfare and Counterinsurgency: US-Soviet Policy in the Third World*, eds. Richard Schultz, Jr., Robert Pfaltzgraff, Jr., Uri Ra'anan, William Olson, and Igor Lukes (Lexington: Lexington Books, 1989), 269-275.
[20] Roberta Goren, *The Soviet Union and Terrorism (*London: George Allen and Unwin, 1984); Walter Laquer, *The Age of Terrorism* (New York: Little Brown & Co., 1988).
[21] For example, Mao Tse-Tung and Samuel Griffiths, trans., *On Guerilla Warfare* (Washington, DC: Department of the Navy, 1989).

and building morale for the rebels.[22] But terrorists could also – for example – weaken a rival state without contesting its sovereignty.[23]

The Cold War also colored the study of this form of warfare. One of the most contentious issues with many of these groups was how closely they were tied to their sponsor states, especially the Soviet Union. How much did Moscow control their actions? For politically (not to say polemically) minded academics, this allowed the reframing of international policy debates to put the onus of action and the burden of guilt onto a preferred actor. Instead of blaming for Israel for sins real and imagined, they could blame Iraq for not ceasing funding to Abu Nidal, and vice versa. Some scholars pointed to the extensive support such groups received from the Soviet Union and countries like Syria, and claimed that Moscow closely controlled their actions.[24] To them, the Soviet Union was the nerve center of international terrorism, a puppet master with everyone from the Red Army Faction to the PLO on its strings. Many of the "close control" analysts were former intelligence or military officers, who often relied on classified or otherwise unverifiable material, and were considered ideological outliers by their colleagues in the field.[25] Others saw state sponsorship as a red herring. Since states were just capitalizing on pre-existing conditions, they could not be the primary cause of

[22] Thomas Thornton, "Terror as a Weapon of Political Agitation," ed. Harry Eckstein, *Internal War: Problems and Approaches* (London: Free Press of Glencoe, 1964).
[23] Byman (2005), 37.
[24] Ray Cline and Yonah Alexander, *Terrorism: The Soviet Connection* (New York: Crane Russak, 1984), 55-60; Stephen Bossony and Francis Bouchey, *International Terrorism: The Communist Connection* (Washington, DC: American Council for World Freedom 1978), 21-40; Claire Sterling, *The Terror Network: The Secret War of International Terrorism* (New York: Henry Holt & Co., 1981); Goren 1984.
[25] Jeffrey Bale, "Terrorists as State 'Proxies': Separating Fact from Fiction," in *Making Sense of Proxy Wars: States, Surrogates & the Use of Force*, ed. Michael Innes (Washington, DC: Potomac Books, 2012), 7.

civil conflict.[26] Some like Noam Chomsky went still further in the opposite direction, blaming interventions and policies by the United States and the West that resulted in wholesale terrorism by right-wing governments and movements.[27]

Others believed that the use of proxies by either side was simply the result of a cost-benefit analysis of modern conflict – states adapting to changes in warfare – and the bipolar struggle during the Cold War.[28] Supporting guerillas and terrorists provided tangible policy gains to the sponsor in certain situations, while also often provoking reactions that delegitimized the government under attack.[29] This included rewarding tactics like suicide bombing, not as the result of particular religious fanaticism or sub-moralism, but rather as a particularly cold-eyed assessment of costs and benefits virtually any state actor might make.[30]

After 1991, this paradigm shifted again. The collapse of the Soviet Union and the end of the Cold War led to the cratering of Soviet support for its proxies. Coincidentally, the remaining insurgents started losing civil wars more frequently, as many of the elements that had strengthened them disappeared.[32] Communism was almost totally discredited as a unifying ideology, despite anachronistic holdouts with their own sources

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[26] Louise Richardson, "State Sponsorship: A Root Cause of Terrorism?" in *Root Causes of Terrorism: Myths, Reality, and Ways Forward*, ed. Tore Bjørgo, (New York: Rutledge, 2005), 195.
[27] Noam Chomsky and Edward Herman, *The Washington Connection and Third World Fascism*, vol. 1 (Boston, MA: South End Press, 1999), 6-7.
[28] Sean O'Brien, "Foreign Policy Crises and the Resort to Terrorism: A Time-Series Analysis of Conflict Linkages." *The Journal of Conflict Resolution* 40, no. 2 (June 1996): 322.
[29] Martha Crenshaw, "The Causes of Terrorism," *Comparative Politics*, 13, 4 (July 1981): 379-379; Juliette Kayyem and Laura Donohue, "Federalism and the Battle over Counterterrorist Law: State Sovereignty, Criminal law Enforcement, and National Security," *Studies and Conflict and Terrorism* 25, 1 (January-March 2001): 9-11.
[30] Robert Pape, "The Strategic Logic of Suicide Terrorism," *American Political Science Review* 97, no. 3 (August 2003): 343-345.
[32] Stathis Kalyvas, "The Changing Character of Civil Wars," in *The Changing Character of War*, eds. Hew Strachan and Sibylle Scheipers (New York: Oxford University Press, 2011), 215.

of funding like the FARC in Colombia.[33] States and proxies may also have suffered from the end of the Cold War and the end of the bipolar system.[34] However, even bereft of outside support, national governments had the advantages of being in power, and so it was insurgent groups that were hurt more.[35] After a brief spike, which some attributed to the removal of superpower support for heavy-handed leaders like Tito, the incidence of civil wars began to decline.[36] Deaths from terrorism also fell, which suggests a reduction in superpower competition did indeed have a multiplying effect on intrastate conflict.[37]

In the modern day, the study of proxy forces has largely focused on Islamist terrorist groups, both because terrorism is again on the rise and (not wholly incidentally) the United States has been involved in long terrorist-linked conflicts in Afghanistan and elsewhere.[38] Russia's support of proxies in places like Ukraine has also focused the discussion. Again, much of the study of these groups concerns the relationship between

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[33] Adam Pzeworski, *Democracy and the Market: Political and Economic Reforms in Eastern Europe and Latin America,* (New York: Cambridge University Press), 6-7; B. Hoffman (1998), 27-28; Ann Hironaka, *Neverending Wars: The International Community, Weak States, and the Perpetuation of Civil War* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2005), 126-127.

[34] William Hale and Eberhard Kienle, *After the Cold War: Security and Democracy in Africa and Asia* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1997), 5; Arthur Stein and Steven Lobell, "Geostructuralism and International Politics: The End of the Cold War and the Regionalization of International Security," in *Regional Orders: Building Security in a New World*, eds. David Lake and Patrick Morgan (University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1997), 117.

[35] Westad, 461-462.

[36] Peter Wallensteen and Karin Axell, "Armed Conflict at the end of the Cold War, 1989-1992," *Journal of Peace Research* 30, no. 3 (1993): 334; Robert Kaplan, *The coming anarchy: Shattering the dreams of the post Cold War* (New York: Random House, 1994), 67, 141; Herfried Münkler, *The New Wars* (Malden: Polity Press, 2005), 7-8; Håvard Hegre, "The Duration and Termination of Civil War," *Journal of Peace Research* 41, no. 3 (May 2004): 243.

[37] Walter Enders and Todd Sandler, "Transnational Terrorism in the Post-Cold War Era," *International Studies Quarterly*, 43, 1. (March 1999): 145-167. This interpretation is not unanimous, however. Some have disputed the link between the end of the Cold War and civil war. They have argued that a shortening of the duration of civil wars, rather than changes in proxy support, was responsible for this decline. Others have pointed to an increased number of low-scale conflicts with small numbers of casualties that increased within the last decade. See James Fearon and David Laitin, "Ethnicity, Insurgency and Civil War," *American Political Science Review* 97, no. 1 (2003): 75–86; Nicholas Sambanis, "What is Civil War?" *Journal of Conflict Resolution* 48, no. 6 (2004): 814-858; Fearon (2004), 276; Kalyvas (2011), 215.

[38] U.S. Department of State, *Country Reports on Terrorism 2015 – Annex of Statistical Information* (Washington, DC: Government Publishing Office, 2016), 3.

state assistance and state control. Some scholars believe that revisionist states like Iran and Syria have replaced the USSR as the great puppet master behind the activities of modern terrorist organizations.[39] Others point to nominal US allies like Pakistan and Saudi Arabia.[40] And to be fair, the Islamist rebels in Afghanistan, Iraq, Tajikistan, Somalia, Chechnya, Bosnia, and elsewhere had some sort of tie with the nations that supported, however indirectly, their ideology. Not a strong one, perhaps, but something. And regardless of relative culpability, most studies of state-sponsored terrorism argue that state sponsorship makes terrorist organizations much more lethal.[41]

What is proxy warfare?

So where does that leave a definition of proxy warfare as a concept? How, in other words, is it possible to wrap up all of these types of indirect intervention into a concise model of proxy warfare? Here, the term proxy warfare will be used to refer to a non-state paramilitary group receiving assistance from a sponsor to achieve strategic ends. Like most other modern definitions of proxy war, it includes three parts: the group itself, an actor in an intrastate conflict; the assistance relationship; and the sponsor, a more powerful entity than the proxy intending to achieve strategic goals.[42]

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[39] Michael Ledeen, *The War Against The Terror Masters: Why It Happened, Where We Are Now, How We'll Win* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 2002); xv-xxii.
[40] Laurent Murawiec, *Princes of Darkness: The Saudi Assault on the West* (Kanham: Rowman & Littlefield 2005); Steven Schwartz, *The two faces of Islam: Saudi Fundamentalism and its role in terrorism* (New York: Knopf, 2003); Arnaud de Borchgrave, "Pakistan's Terror, Inc." *The Washington Times* (January 14, 2008).
[41] Byman (2005), 18.
[42] Karl Deutsch, "External Involvement in Internal War," in Harry Eckstein, ed., *Internal War, Problems and Approaches* (New York: Free Press of Glencoe, 1964), 100-110; Mumford, 1; Groh, 28-29; Hughes, 11.

First, the group itself. In this dissertation, and broadly in the literature, the proxy must be a substate group, though some authors argue that proxies can include states. For example, the Soviet Union used Cuban forces to intervene in Angola. Or, more directly, the United States supported the United Kingdom's fight against Nazi Germany before the attack on Pearl Harbor. Geraint Hughes believes this is a misguided analogy because state alliances are far broader and more in-depth than proxy relationships, where the issue is simple expediency. National governments also have much more ability to pursue their own interests.[43] Yakov Bar-Siman-Tov sees state alliances as precisely the opposite of a proxy relationship: in alliances, states are willing to share the sacrifices of war together, with often the burden falling on the larger state to guarantee the safety of the smaller. The support of a proxy is meant to shift military sacrifice, rather than bear it itself.[44] This dissertation is agnostic: s  s could conceptually be proxies of other states, perhaps, but here the focus is on relevance and the methods by which states are most actively intervening. So there is a utility to focusing on substate groups, which America's enemies today are using effectively. 

Must the group have an intrinsically political orientation? The number of private military companies like Wagner or Blackwater has greatly increased since the end of the Cold War and could certainly be considered proxies.[45] Some would disagree with that, insisting on a political locus of the agent and placing companies and mercenaries into a separate category.[46] That does not seem dispositive: as long as the group is an armed

[43] Hughes, 12-14.
[44] Yaacov Bar-Siman-Tov, "The Strategy of War by Proxy," *Cooperation and Conflict* XIX (1984), 270.
[45] P.W. Singer, *Corporate Warriors: The Rise of the Privatized Military Industry* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2003), 187.
[46] Mumford, 84-85.

force that can effect a policy result, the nature of their tie to local political actors is not critical outside of the impact it can have on effectiveness. In three of the cases examined here – Ukraine and Chechnya – actors from outside the conflict zones were transplanted to the war to advance their sponsor's policy. Proxies can include actors like private military companies; indeed, this is one of the most rapidly growing areas in the study of warfare.[47] Russia's use of the military company Wagner in places like Libya and Mozambique has been quite effective in advancing its interests, though the capability it offers is wholly non-organic to the local populace.

A key element of proxy warfare for many analysts is the relative disparity of power between the entity that receives assistance and the entity that provides it.[48] For Bar-Siman-Tov, the key point is that the donor's stature and military power in the international munity is greater than the recipient's.[49] That disparity in power can be represented by the concept of control or dependency. For them, aid to a group without any control is something qualitatively different: call it capacity building, or donated assistance, or something, but not a proxy-sponsor relationship.[50] However, it is hard to imagine a situation where the allure of more assistance does not have at least some influence, however small, on a proxy. the categories of hybrid warfare, the lesser-controlled proxy model is another subset of models that can be examined as part of a greater whole. Other scholars do not see the issue of control as primarily one of

[47] William Rosenau and Peter Chalk, "Multinational Corporations: Potential Proxies for Counterinsurgency?" in *Making Sense of Proxy Wars: States, Surrogates & the Use of Force*, ed. Michael Innes, *Making Sense of Proxy Wars: States, Surrogates & the Use of Force* (Washington, DC: Potomac Books, 2012).
[48] Groh, 28, 119.
[49] Bar-Siman-Tov, 266.
[50] Eli Berman, David Lake, Gerard Padró i Miquel, and Pierre Yared, "Principals, Agents, and Indirect Foreign Policies," in Eli Berman and David Lake, eds., *Proxy Wars: Suppressing Violence through Local Agents* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2019), 10; Groh, 28.

dependency. If a group is dependent on state aid, it is effectively subordinate, without disposing of the issue of control as such.[51] Some of the less-organic proxies in the modern world are dependent on their sponsor, such as the private security company Wagner, which could not exist without the protection of the Russian government.

The relative disparity in power between the sponsor and proxy points to a popular framework for describing proxy warfare: the principal-agent dynamic. Principal-agent theory was developed in economics but later broadened to other cases where there is an actor with specialized expertise and its client. It entered political science through its application to American comparative politics and economics.[52] The key elements here were firstly that the relationship was hierarchical.[53] The principal could influence the agent more than vice-versa and it had more choices of agents to support, and could thus withdraw its support.[54] Second, both sides entered the relationship because they brought different skills to the table and were pursuing similar goals.[55] For the sponsor, there were the resources, and for the proxy, knowledge of the local terrain and deniability.[56] But like agents, proxies are imperfect animals. Sometimes they fail to do the thing contracted.[57] Sometimes they receive the resources and fail to even try.[58] Sometimes they turn against their sponsor, like Osama Bin Laden and some of the other Afghan

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[51] Bale, 16.
[52] Darren Hawkins, David Lake, Daniel Nielson, and Michael Tierney, "Delegation under anarchy: states, international organizations, and principal-agent theory," in Darren Hawkins, David Lake, Daniel Nielson, and Michael Tierney, eds., *Delegation and Agency in International Organizations* (New York, NY: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 4.
[53] Groh, 29.
[54] Eli Berman and David Lake, "Conclusion," in Eli Berman and David Lake, eds., *Proxy Wars: Suppressing Violence through Local Agents* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2019), 296-297.
[55] Hawkins et al., 13-14.
[56] Berman et al., 12.
[57] Barry Mitnick, The theory of agency: the policing "paradox" and regulatory behavior," Public Choice, 24 (Winter 1975): 27-42; Susan Shapiro, "Agency Theory" Annual Review of Sociology 31:1 (2005), 281.
[58] Berman et al., 13.

Arabs.[59] And in any case the principal also faces multiple costs, beyond simply the promised resources. It first must pay for the thing done, which requires resources to seize X city or Y mountain. Second, it has to pay to monitor and ensure that its proxy group does what was promised. And third, it has to pay to incentivize more desirable actions if its proxy has dropped the ball.[60]

What about the issue of assistance? There is a kaleidoscope of potential types of state assistance to proxy groups in armed conflict, which some authors stratify into formal categories.[61] These include whether state representatives  their proxy forces, and how much training is given. Some authors like Mumford see the participation of third party state advisors as the key element of proxy warfare – or at least the key element that makes it successful.[62] They include whether states arm their proxies, and how much armament is supplied, which others see as the most common and significant way for states to intervene.[63] It can also include how much economic support is given, and which entities are paid; and not just by the state, but by non-state entities like diaspora groups as well.[64] It can include logistical support, like Syria assisting Sunni fundamentalists travelling to Iraq to fight the US. It can include whether a state's military or civilian officers hold official roles within the proxy force, or if the proxies are wholly indigenous; and also whether conventional state forces ever fight alongside proxy forces, and if so

[59] Rodrick Kiewiet and Matthew McCubbins, *Logic of Delegation: Congressional Parties and the Appropriations Process* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1991), 25-26.
[60] Hawkins et al., 24-25.
[61] Bale, 25-26; Bertil Duner, *Military Intervention in Civil Wars*, (New York, St Martin's Press, 1985), 99-100.
[62] Mumford, 61-62.
[63] Chris Loveman, "Assessing the phenomenon of proxy intervention," *Conflict, Security & Development* 2, no. 3 (2002): 31.
[64] John MacKinlay, *The Insurgent Archipelago: From Mao to Bin Laden* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2009), 58.

how consistently. A key distinction for some is whether the support is active or not; was the state actively providing it or passively permitting it?[65] Actively supplying weapons to a proxy, for example, could for some be a qualitatively different state policy than allowing the Boston Police Department to slough off guns to the Irish Republican Army. Did state forces turn a blind eye to proxy military activity and allow sanctuary; or did they protect the proxy from harm, and offer a safe haven? It might also include allowing domestic recruits, as in Saudi Arabia, being permitted to join proxy forces, or enabled to do so. But that seems artificial:  seem to require a conscious policy decision, and both are analyzed in different cases here.

Some of these relationships in proxy wars include features that have been described as hybrid war, which is properly a subset of proxy war. The essence of hybrid war is a blurring of these different types of war – conventional, irregular, terrorist – and their use (often simultaneously) to project political power.[66] Proxy forces in hybrid war are used alongside conventional forces, and it is a useful way to think about certain "closer" relationships between states and their proxies. Indeed, some of the cases here involve classic cases of hybrid war, such as Russia's support of its Donbas proxies in Ukraine. Some see this as a new phenomenon. For Frank Hoffman, the blending of conventional and irregular forces down to the operational and even tactical level is what makes hybrid war a relatively recent innovation in warfare, distinct from the strategic blending between regular and irregular units that has occurred in the past.[67] For others

[65] Hughes, 12.
[66] Peter Mansoor, "Hybrid Warfare in History," in Williamson Murray and Peter Mansoor, eds., *Hybrid Warfare: Fighting Complex Opponents from the Ancient World to the Present* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2012), 3; Michael Evans, "From Kadesh to Kandahar: Military Theory and the Future of War," *Naval War College Review* (Summer 2003): 136. Colin Gray, *Another Bloody Century: Future Warfare* (London: Weidenfeld and Nicholson, 2005), 342-343, 375, 382-385.
[67] Frank Hoffman, "Hybrid Warfare and Challenges," *Joint Forces Quarterly* 52 (1st quarter 2009): 36.

like Andrew Krepinovich, the threat of hybrid war has long been a feature of conflict and has posed challenges for conventional militaries in Vietnam and elsewhere.[68] Williamson Murray goes further and sees this challenge and response as stretching back to the ancient world.[69] Drawing off of the Russian context, Alexander Lanoska suggests additional factors that make hybrid war more likely, such as local escalation dominance, a complex ethnography, and a belligerent that is trying to revise the status quo.[70] For the purposes this dissertation, hybrid war is simply one type of relationship and thus one set of measurements of the distance between sponsor and proxy. Indeed, it is actually an outlier: hybrid war involves very close support to and coordination with a sponsor's proxy.

What makes proxy warfare effective?

There has been a great amount of work done on why states have used proxies in one form or another over the past eighty years. There is less on proxy war as a concept. But there is less still on modeling what makes it work. That is the conceptual gap this dissertation seeks to fill.

Measuring effectiveness can be a tricky thing. The use of terrorists as proxies, proxies which have virtually no ability to contest the sovereignty of another state, points to an important feature of proxy warfare: that winning is not always necessary for the sponsor. Most analysts agree states can have other goals than victory in a proxy

[68] Andrew Krepinovich, *The Army and Vietnam* (Baltimore, MD: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1986), 258.
[69] Williamson Murray, "What the Past Suggests," in Williamson Murray and Peter Mansoor, eds., *Hybrid Warfare: Fighting Complex Opponents from the Ancient World to the Present* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2012), 290.
[70] Aleksander Lanoska, "Russian hybrid warfare and extended deterrence in eastern Europe," *International Affairs* 92, 1 (2016): 176.

conflict.[73] A sponsor's goal might be political leverage, forcing a different policy choice on a rival. States can also intervene to support rebellions as part of a process of disrupting the target state's growth in power even if the rebellions themselves do not succeed.[74] Or the goal can be something altogether more total, like inciting the target's collapse.[75] Goals may change: Groh suggests that sponsor goals for the proxy will become more ambitious the more vital the interests at stake in a conflict are.[76] And in any case it is not always obvious. There is always the peril of defining ex post facto that the goals achieved by the proxy were the state's goals, or attributing to a state goals it has not declared. With the semi-clandestine nature of proxy warfare, states often do not announce exactly what they hope to achieve.

This points to a key utility of proxy warfare that conventional intervention does not offer: simply prolonging a conflict going can be extremely beneficial for the sponsor. Because its costs are much lower than intervening conventionally in the conflict, allowing a conflict to continue often offers more benefit and less risk than if the state was actively involved. Allowing an inconclusive conflict to continue: for example, Saudi Arabia's war against the Iran-backed Houthis in Yemen – is a useful way to embarrass and wear down rivals which have to fight an increasingly expensive and messy war.[77] Winning can be even less important for anti-status quo states, revisionist states, like the ones examined here, since they are simply trying to make the cost of maintaining the

[73] Groh, 34; Hughes, 2. However, some dispute that states don't always want to win. See, for example, Mumford, 46-48.
[74] Idean Salehyan, The Delegation of War to Rebel Organizations, *The Journal of Conflict Resolution* 54, no. 3 (June 2010): 504-505.
[75] Hughes, 20-21.
[76] Groh, 36.
[77] Hughes, 20-21.

status quo too pricey. The goals for each sponsor in each case then must be determined carefully on a case-by-case basis to most clearly assess the effectiveness of means.

Much of the literature that exists on effectiveness focuses on control, again drawing from principal-agent theory, and stresses the benefit for a sponsor of tightly controlling its proxy. According to many authors, a hands-off approach might make the intervener's policy more effective with regard for domestic and international audiences but would likely lose coherence as the proxy pursued its own ends. That could affect its political alignment, allowing space to emerge between the proxy – the agent – and its sponsor – the principal.[79] This is a key element of the cost-effectiveness of proxy warfare deriving from principal-agent study. Groh, who insists on control as a condition of proxy warfare, the correct amount of control needed is a function of the convergence of the sponsor's objectives and that of the proxy.[82] If the goals of the sponsor and proxy diverged too widely, a great amount of control over the latter would be needed. If they did not diverge, very little control would be needed. This alignment of a sponsor's goals and a proxy's is critical to efficiency because it keeps the price of sponsorship down. Only if both groups' interests are perfectly aligned can support be given with no strings attached. Otherwise, some element of the cost will need to be spent on managing the carrots and sticks to keep the proxy in line. The price of indirect

[78] Andreas Krieg and Jean-Marc Rickli, *Surrogate Warfare: The Transformation of War in the Twenty-First Century*, (Washington, DC: Georgetown University Press, 2019), 117-118; Hughes, 143; Brian Glyn Williams, "Fighting with a double-edged sword? Proxy Militias in Iraq, Afghanistan, Bosnia, and Chechnya," ed. Michael Innes, *Making Sense of Proxy Wars: States, Surrogates & the Use of Force* (Washington, DC: Potomac Books, 2012).
[79] Rodrick Kiewiet and Matthew McCubbins, *Logic of Delegation: Congressional Parties and the Appropriations Process* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1991), 5.
[82] Groh, 114-115.

intervention could actually exceed that of direct intervention if the costs of controlling a proxy grow too high.[83]

Pessimists about the value of proxy warfare often see the inherent lack of control as the element that makes the proxy-sponsor relationship fundamentally nonstrategic.[84] Less control risks more criminality, as often-poorly disciplined militia units control territory with few or right limits of behavior. The Colombian AUC's drift into narcotics trafficking is a good example. Uncontrolled proxies may be at a greater risk of committing wartime atrocities, like some of the more jihadist Syrian rebel groups, or unexpectedly widen the conflict, leading to diplomatic consequences and worse for the sponsor. y may fight among themselves with allied factions or states, as with the Kurdish militias in Iraq, or escalate the conflict, as the most radical Chechen elements did with their invasion of Dagestan in 1999.[85] All of e factors argue for a sponsor exerting more control over a proxy. And for their part, the advocates for the effectiveness of hybrid war see close proximity to the proxy as a hallmark not just of the new form of war, but of its success.[86]

It is not at all clear, however, that greater control over the proxy leads to better results. Overcontrolling can lead to the sponsor losing the benefits of indirect control, obviating the entire point of indirect intervention.[87] The flip side of proximity is secrecy: the secrecy of a sponsor's support, or its plausible deniability. Deniability is one of the main reasons that scholars have offered for the use of proxies in war.[88] The primary

[83] Kiewiet and McCubbins, 24-25; Berman and Lake, 3-5.
[84] Groh, 144.
[85] Hughes, 50-58.
[86] F. Hoffman (2009), 38.
[87] Groh, 121.
[88] B. Hoffman (1998), 258; Byman, 48.

benefit here of deniability is that it minimizes internal and external costs other than those directly related to the proxy. It can prevent – or at least delay – international partners from mobilizing against the sponsor.[89] How much was the sponsor state blamed for the actions of its proxy? How effectively did the international community punish that sponsorship? The consequence-to-deniability ratio is not as neat as that, of course: the sponsor might well not be blamed at all, for reasons that have nothing to do with the effectiveness of its proxy or its degree of control. An internationally isolated country that supports a proxy may suffer a great deal, while another sponsor like Russia, which has a multitude of inducements and enticements to attract allies, may suffer very little. Deniability also gives potential balancers the ability to look the other way, and not provoke a confrontation if the target country at stake falls lower in their priority list.[90] If the policy is not popular domestically, secrecy can also help keep public opinion from shaping against it.[91] States also have less risk of becoming emotionally or politically invested in a conflict if they maintain sufficient distance, which would cloud the cold-eyed decision-making necessary to manage escalation and involvement.[92]

This dissertation argues such secrecy is the signature element of proxy warfare and the decisive one. Some authors acknowledge secrecy has an implicit tradeoff with the type of proxy war that can be waged, because plausible deniability limits the amount of support that can be provided.[93] But others agree that in certain situations, military support is also overvalued. State support could have negative effects on proxies and their

[89] Krieg and Rickli, 72.
[90] Groh, 97.
[91] Krieg and Rickli, 63, 67.
[92] Groh, 115.
[93] Mumford, 41-42.

operations. Authors like Kaufman argue the quantity of military support is not always determinative of victory in a proxy conflict.[95] The most critical element is the political effectiveness of the proxy, and its ability to maneuver in the domestic landscape as an entity with some alien elements. Other critical elements are the proxy's tactical sophistication and its technological expertise. The introduction of the regular military forces of the sponsor does not necessarily lead to victory. It can actually be counterproductive by affecting the interaction of the proxy and the political landscape.[96] Since sponsor states usually demand some degree over its proxies' goals and even their operations, that interaction could become even more strained and counterproductive, as the sponsor made demands without intimate knowledge of local political conditions.[97]

Others point to various military conditions that can shape effectiveness. Hughes notes that tactical sophistication and technological expertise of the proxy are key for an effective sponsor-proxy relationship: the proxy has to be able to use the weapons the sponsor provides.[98] When Ukrainian rebels shot down a civilian airliner in 2014 with advanced air defense weapons, the European Union leveled damaging sanctions on Russia, which theretofore it had been slow to do. Hybrid war theorists agree and suggest this is a new development: the ability of irregular forces to receive and employ advanced technology is a new feature of hybrid warfare, which can also make them sometimes dominant to western forces in their own localized area.[99]

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[95] Chaim Kaufman, "Intervention in ethnic and ideological civil wars," in Robert Art, Kenneth Waltz, eds., *The Use of Force: Military Power and International Politics*, 7th ed. (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, Inc., 2009), 417.
[96] Hughes, 34.
[97] Idean Salehyan, Kristian Skrede Gleditsch, and David Cunningham, "Explaining External Support for Insurgent Groups," *International Organization* 65 (Fall 2011): 716.
[98] Hughes, 32-33, 143.
[99] James Mattis and Frank Hoffman, "Future Warfare: The Rise of Hybrid Warfare," *Proceedings* (November 2005): 1-2.

This dissertation combines these concepts of control and military effectiveness. It argues that these constitute a single variable: the sponsor's proximity to the proxy, which it calls deniability. That measurement is the best assessment of the likelihood of strategic success in proxy war. It suggests the key tradeoff is between operational capability and deniability, both of which in the right amounts are necessary for strategic success but which exist in a zero-sum equation.[100] It thus examines both how effective the proxy forces were on the battlefield and how effectively the host country countered them. But it is broader, since proxies are often wholly overmatched compared to the states they oppose and sometimes their function is not to win wars by themselves. It thus assesses how effective was the proxy at achieving the state's strategic goals, regardless of its tactical performance.

Lastly, that strategic effectiveness must be measured against the basic reason states continue to intervene indirectly: because it is cheaper. How much did the sponsor state have to invest in the proxy to achieve its results? What, in other words, was the proportional bang for the buck? This metric is partially a function of the first two measurements: it is the first, plus direct costs, divided by the second. How much did the received strategic utility cost the state in terms of international condemnation, hard cash and weapons, and any violence received from the proxy itself? Though this value is not computed quantitatively, its will be analyzed as a key measure of effectiveness in a core function of delegating the authority for war to a proxy. It is the key measurement of

[100] There is also clearly some ideological benefit to supporting proxies, which can provide a metric of success independent from either deniability or battlefield utility. However, because this dissertation focuses on the strategic effectiveness of proxies, particularly in conflicts, ideological benefits will not be included in measurements of success. This study is concerned with how to successfully project power, and less concerned with the elements that strengthen domestic regimes.

efficiency, the amount of resources necessary for a result, a question with which this dissertation had its genesis.

And efficiency is an important question. In the future, the number of proxy wars is likely to increase, driven by a number of factors that mitigate against interstate war. At the moment the US is still clinging to its position in most areas as a political landowner, which resists and can resist the efforts of revisionist countries to change the political status quo by force. But one of the motivating assumptions here is that compared with the three decades after the collapse of the Soviet Union, the United States' position in the world is changing. In fewer and fewer places it is likely to be able to maintain the current (usually democratic) status quo, because it will have comparatively less ability to project its power out to the frontier or to incentivize the loyalty of nonaligned regimes. It is not controversial to suggest that the relative power of China is increasing and will continue to do so, COVID-19 and all, for the foreseeable future. That means more missiles; it means a larger blue water navy, and it means greater soft power ability to win over friendly governments via the Belt and Road Initiative or similar engagement strategies. Governments friendlier to China will likely be less friendly to the United States on key issues, such as representative government and regional security. To retain its interests in these areas, the United States could be forced, like during the Cold War, to actively contest a bipolar system state-by-state with all the tools at hand, including proxies.

CHAPTER TWO: RUSSIA AND GEORGIA, 2003-2008

The Georgia war was a seminal event for Europe, and yet familiar. It was the first full-blown Russian invasion of a European state since the Prague Spring in 1968 and yet the Russians largely escaped censure. How? The location of this conflict, the Caucasus, should have been a nightmare for projecting power. It was a nightmare geographically, crisscrossed by 18,000 foot-high mountain ranges, and a nightmare politically, with ethnic and linguistic communities scattered hodgepodge across the four states of the region. Its heterogeneity had always been both a hindrance and an opportunity for invaders. When it was eventually half-conquered in the early nineteenth century, the Russians played off ethnic divisions to isolate rebellious communities and used conventional brute force to push out rivals. They would do something similar in 2008.

This chapter analyzes how Russia used militia proxies in Abkhazia and South Ossetia against Georgia. It has three parts. First, it outlines the origin of the conflicts and Russia's ideological approach to its near abroad, including Russia's proxy strategy for the breakaway regions. Russia was the prime sponsor of ethnic separatists in both areas, lending them comprehensive military and political support. There were Russian officers serving in key positions, Abkhaz and South Ossetians were given Russian citizenship, and both economies (above all that of South Ossetia) were heavily linked to Russia's. Most representative of this relationship, however, was that Russia was prepared to intervene militarily on behalf of its proxies, and indeed had conventional forces pre-positioned alongside their own. There were conventional Russian military operations in 2004 and 2007, and in August 2008 Russia would send a large force openly through the Roki Tunnel to overwhelm the Georgians, occupy South Ossetia, and win the war.

Second, this chapter examines key moments from 2000 through 2008 (with a focus on 2004-2008) when Russia's relationship with these proxies changed and how the international community responded. Lastly, it sums up the strategic outcome of the August War and key conclusions from this case. Above all, it suggests that Russia's use of proxies was successful in Georgia because it managed to escalate the military pressure on Georgia gradually and with enough plausible deniability to avoid consequences to itself. Deniability did not come through the usual proxy method of hiding its ties to the separatists, or offering more indirect support, since in both cases its conventional forces fought alongside them. Rather, the impact of these ties were blunted by Russia's low-level warfare, which raised the threshold of conventional aggression enough that its forces could operate without crossing that threshold and inviting an international response. International reactions were further muted by disagreements in the US and among other NATO members about expansion further to the east and the proper cognizance of Russian interests, as well as concern about Georgian President Mikheil Saakashvili. Russian deniability was also affected by the presence of other local proxy conflicts, primarily Chechnya, the local ethnic shape of the battlefield, and the flawed nature of the diplomatic and peacekeeping mechanisms.

I. Origin

The question of how Russia approached Georgia partially depended on the existential question of what exactly the Russian state was, and who was a Russian. This had historically been a matter of some debate, given Russia's significant ethnic heterogeneity. The Soviet Union had expressly allowed for some self-determination as

both a concession to reality and an inducement to Russia's ethnicities to favor its rule over that of the czars. Within the USSR there were fifty-three different governmental structures and determinations according different levels of autonomy to its peoples, from Soviet Socialist Republics (SSRs) and Autonomous Republics down to autonomous *okrugs*.[101] This layering was intended to channel nationalism into manageable institutions, and also to reward and punish greater or lesser enthusiasm for the supranational Soviet project at its outset. Abkhazia and South Ossetia, on the territory of Georgia – an SSR and a nationality question itself – were two of these structures. When the USSR collapsed, there were 25 million people living outside Russia's borders who described themselves as ethnic Russians and 36 million who considered Russian their native language.[102] As in post-colonial upheavals elsewhere in the world, these people often faced *de facto* discrimination by newly independent states. Estonia and Latvia, for example, instituted strict language requirements for citizenship that prevented ethnic Russians from voting. In alcoves like Transdniestria, Russian civilians were trapped abroad in legal vacuums and caught up in post-colonial ethnic violence.[103] Over the next several years, a lively debate emerged among Russian intellectuals, politicians, and national security experts about what should be done for these people and, as a corollary,

[101] Robert Kaiser, *The Geography of Nationalism in Russia and the USSR* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1994), 352; David Laitin, *Identity in Formation: The Russian-speaking Populations in the Near Abroad* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1998), 68.
[102] Gerard Toal, *Near Abroad: Putin, the West, and the Contest over Ukraine and the Caucasus* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2017), 65.
[103] Mark Beissinger, *Nationalist Mobilization and the Collapse of the Soviet State* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002).

what should be Russia's role in the formerly Soviet countries, the so-called near abroad.[104]

The answer to that question in turn depended on the definition of Russia. Russia's policies should presumably reflect the nature of the state, which prompted the question of what Russia was. Was it an explicitly national great power, based on ethnic Russians; a revived imperial state in Eurasia; or a liberal Western democracy, reborn into European norms like postwar Germany?[105] Boris Yeltsin, the Russian Federation's first president, by instinct leaned towards the latter. He had won power on the back of his charisma and bravery during the August 1991 coup, and staunchly opposed the political alliance between communists and nationalists early in his term.[106] Yeltsin was not wholly a dove. He reinstituted the czarist double-headed eagle as Russia's state emblem and supported military deployments to places like Transdniestria. However, he was also anti-Soviet: anti-everything Soviet, including the domination of Eastern Europe. He allowed former SSRs to build their own sovereignty by tacitly eroding the rights of ethnic Russians, for which he came under nationalist criticism at home.[107] His administration mirrored this ambiguity on the relation of Russian identity to Russian foreign policy.[108] His foreign minister Andrei Kozyrev argued that Moscow should address the ethnicity issue as part of its conciliatory policy towards the West. Russians should support their

[104] Dov Lynch, *Russian Peacekeeping Strategies in the CIS: The Case of Moldova, Georgia and Tajikistan* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 2000), 49-50; Viatcheslav Morozov, *Russia's Postcolonial Identity: A Subaltern Empire in a Eurocentric World* (New York: Palgrave, 2015).
[105] Toal, 76.
[106] Tim McDaniel, *The Agony of the Russian Idea* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1996), 174-175.
[107] Laitin, 104.
[108] Andrei Tsygankov, *Russia's Foreign Policy: Change and Continuity in National Identity* (Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield, 2013), 85.

ethnic compatriots through international organizations, rather than with direct political or military support, which would lead to confrontation.

In few areas was this question as fraught as the now-separated former Soviet state of Georgia and its own multiple separatist areas, which was symptomatic of the chaotic nationality issues in the Caucasus. As the Soviet period ended, Moscow's overriding policy goal shifted from maintaining the Union to limiting the fallout, particularly resurgent ethnic conflict. Russia had dominated the southern Caucasus since 1783 when the predecessor to modern Georgia agreed to become a Russian protectorate. Under different military and civil authorities, Georgia remained part of Tsarist Russia until the Bolshevik Revolution in 1917. After a short-lived period of Georgian independence, Georgia was once more brought under Moscow's control in 1921, despite sustained opposition to Soviet rule and regular later demonstrations for ethnic and cultural rights.[109] These became more acute as the Cold War waned. During a peaceful gathering calling for reforms in Tbilisi in 1989, Soviet troops opened fire on demonstrators, killing twenty people.[110] A coalition made up of nationalists and other activists won a plurality in the country's first multiparty parliamentary elections a year later in 1990. As a result, Zviad Gamsakhurdia became first the chairman of the republic's parliament and then President of an independent Georgia in 1991.[111] Gamsakhurdia was a fiery orator and ideologue, but unpredictable; a tumultuous leader but also one whose relations with the breakaway

[109] Stephen Jones, "The Establishment of Soviet Power in Transcaucasia: The Case of Georgia 1921-1928," *Soviet Studies* 40, no. 4 (October 1988): 623.
[110] Darrell Slider, "Democratization in Georgia," in *Conflict, Cleavage, and Change in Central Asia and the Caucasus*, ed. Karen Dawisha and Bruce Parrott (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1997), 161.
[111] Charles King, *The Ghost of Freedom: A History of the Caucasus (*New York: Oxford University Press, 2008), 212.

regions (above all the Abkhaz) were actually better than they would be under his successor, veteran apparatchik Eduard Shevardnadze.

Source: Edward Boyle, *Borderization in Georgia: Sovereignty Materialized*, Eurasia Border Review 7, 18 (March 31, 2017): 6.

During these years, Russia had a proxy relationship with neither the South Ossetians nor the Abkhaz and was broadly supportive of Georgia's negotiations with them over political questions. Boris Yeltsin generally backed Georgian president Eduard Sheverdnadze (though some of his generals did not) and avoided giving direct military support to either the Abkhaz or South Ossetian separatists. This reflected Russia's initially stabilizing, status quo goals towards the two areas. Certainly, segments of the Russian military, both at the top and those stationed in Abkhazia, were hostile to the new Georgian government and soon-to-be President Eduard Shevardnazhe, who they blamed for sabotaging the Soviet Union.[112] However, the supportive policy set by Yeltsin and

[112] Fact-Finding Report, 79-80.

Kozyrev set the tone of bilateral relations. The terms of the ceasefires Moscow initially negotiated in Abkhazia represented an effort to end the fighting on a neutral basis. None of the agreements, for example, promoted Abkhaz independence, and all sought to include international institutions in the process.

Abkhazia had been absorbed into Tsarist Russia in 1810, around the same time as Georgia. During the Russian civil war, Abkhazia had served as a center for Bolshevik supporters until it was conquered by Georgia in 1918 and then both entities were conquered by Russia in 1921.[113] Like that of most other ethnicities, Abkhaz nationalism began to revive as the Soviet Union weakened.[114] After Georgian President Gamsakhurdia's fall in 1992, the Abkhaz Supreme Soviet declared Abkhazia an independent state. The next month Georgia sent troops into Abkhazia to seize Abkhazia's western coastline and fighting erupted.[115] There was some Russian military support to the Abkhaz during the conflict, but it was haphazard, low-level, and unrepresentative of the Kremlin's official policy. At the top, Yeltsin and Kozyrev continued fundamentally stabilizing goals, trying to bring the two parties to the table to halt the fighting in a context of Georgian sovereignty. In September 1992, they brokered a deal that included, for the first time ever, an Abkhaz guarantee of Georgia's territorial integrity.[116] Moscow also made a good-faith effort to halt the hundreds of volunteers from across the North Caucasus, including Chechens and Cossacks, who flocked to the

[113] Tim Potier, *Conflict in Nagorno-Karabakh, Abkhazia, and South Ossetia: A Legal Appraisal* (The Hague: Kluwer Law International, 2001), 9.
[114] Slider, 171.
[115] Edward Ozhiganov, "The Republic of Georgia: Conflict in Abkhazia and South Ossetia," in *Managing Conflict in the Former Soviet Union: Russian and American Perspectives*, ed. Alexei Arbatov, Adam Chayes, Antonia Handler Chayes, and Lara Olson (Cambridge: Center for Science and International Affairs, 1997), 379.
[116] Fact-Finding Report, 77.

Abkhaz banner.[117] However, some local Russian military forces (including those at the Gudauta base in Abkhazia) also provided unofficial military aid to the separatists, including weapons and intelligence.[118] These advantages helped Abkhaz forces seize control of Georgia's coastal gains during a surprise offensive in October 1992. By the time a cease-fire was signed in Moscow in 1994, the Abkhazians had captured the capital of Sukhumi and pushed the Georgians back to the regional border and the Khodori Gorge.[119]

This Moscow Agreement confirmed the status of Russian troops as peacekeepers in Abkhazia. Technically the peacekeepers were supposed to come from the Commonwealth of Independent States, but in reality most were Russian.[120] The UN Security Council endorsed the arrangement, despite doubts from some members, and expanded the United Nations Observer Mission In Georgia (UNOMIG) to monitor it. This institution was critical to Russia's later proxy war: the CIS force provided a future shield for Abkhaz operations, behind which they could remain protected from Georgian interference if Russia so chose. Its presence was legitimated by the agreement. This would enable Russia to provide direct support for the separatists if it so chose, without suffering the diplomatic costs of a military buildup.

A similar evolution of Russian goals was occurring in South Ossetia, where Russian troops were also embedded and which also had a claim on autonomy, though a much weaker one than Abkhazia. Russia's control over the South Ossetians as a proxy

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[117] Christoph Zürcher, "Georgia's Time of Troubles, 1989-1993," in *Statehood and Security: Georgia After the Rose Revolution*, ed. Bruno Coppieters and Robert Legvold (Cambridge: MIT Press, 2005), 96.
[118] Alexei Zverev, "Ethnic Conflicts in the Caucasus, 1988-1994," in *Contested Borders in the Caucasus*, ed. Bruno Coppieters (Brussels: VUB University Press, 1996), 51-52.
[119] Ronald Asmus, *A Little War That Shook The World* (New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2010), 62.
[120] Zürcher, 96.

perhaps not coincidentally became eventually greater than over the Abkhazians, as did its support. However, Russian support of the Ossetians during the conflict from 1990-1991 exhibited the same improvisational quality and was characterized by significant independence of action within the military. Geographically and politically, the Ossetian homeland was split, with the Caucasus Mountains dividing Ossetians between the North Ossetia-Alania republic in Russia and the autonomous district of South Ossetia in Georgia. The main strategic corridor between the two (and thus Russia and Georgia) was the Roki Tunnel. North Ossetia had belonged to the Russian Empire since 1767; South Ossetia joined it after its parent state the Georgian kingdom of Kartli-Kakheti was swallowed by Russia in 1803.[121] After the destruction of the independent Georgian state by the Red Army in 1921, South Ossetia was designated an Autonomous District within the Georgian SSR in 1922, codifying a special status which it had not had before.[122] After decades of atrophy, Ossetian nationalism flared again in late 1989 in the capital of Tskhinvali and after a series of confrontations exploded into violence in October 1990.[123] Like in Abkhazia, Russia's support for the Ossetian militias was sclerotic. Certain local Russian units, such as the helicopter regiment stationed at Tskhinvali (which was majority Ossetian itself), supplied the South Ossetians with arms.[124] The Ossetian side was also buttressed by support and volunteers from North Ossetia.[125] However, Yeltsin rejected a South Ossetian referendum in January 1992 calling for unification with Russia,

[121] See Helen Krag and Lars Funk, "The North Caucasus, Minorities at a Crossroads," *Minority Rights Group International Report* 94, 5 (November 1994): 26, http://www.minorityrights.org/download.php@id-=419 (accessed 18 July, 2015).
[122] Peter Roudik, "Russian Federation: Legal Aspects of the War in Georgia." Library of Congress 200801474: 1-2, http://www.loc.gov/law/help/russian-georgia-war.php (accessed 19 July, 2015).
[123] Slider, 171.
[124] Edmund Herzig, *The New Caucasus: Armenia, Azerbaijan, and Georgia*, (London: Royal Institute of International Affairs, 1999), 74.
[125] Zürcher, 106.

fearing it would send a hostile message to other formerly Soviet states.[126] Under his personal supervision, Shevardnadze and representatives from both Ossetias signed a ceasefire in Sochi in June 1992. To monitor the accord, the Sochi Agreement created a joint peacekeeping control commission (JCC, composed of the two combatants plus Russia and the North Ossetians), based in Tskhinvali.[127] Operationally, the joint peacekeeping forces would be comprised of a maximum of 500 troops each of Georgians, Russians, and Ossetians, and fall under the command of the Russian Federation. Though this agreement also codified Russia's military presence in South Ossetia, it was significant that the joint peacekeeping force also included Georgian troops, which would not be true two years later in Abkhazia.

The independent actions by local military units during these conflicts was symptomatic of broader opposition in the Russian defense ministry about the ideological approach of Yeltsin's government to its near abroad. Defense Minister Pavel Grachev and other senior leadership profoundly disagreed with Kozyrev's hands-off, internationalist approach to the regions, arguing instead for the necessity of military force to enact change. Under pressure, Kozyrev in April 1993 revised Russia's national security interests to include ethnic Russian communities in the old USSR, which was subsequently codified in a new Russian military doctrine adopted in November.[128] These changes had broader political appeal. They were strongly supported by Vladimir Zhirinovsky's Liberal Democratic Party (LDP) of Russia, which won the most votes in

[126] Zverev, 13-71.
[127] "Agreement on Principles of Settlement of the Georgian-Ossetian Conflict" (June 24, 1992), http://www.rrc.ge/law/xels_1992_06_24_e.htm?lawid=368&lng_3=en (accessed on July 18, 2015).
[128] Stanislav Lunev, "Russia's Ominous New Military Doctrine, *Prism* 1, issue 25 (December 1, 1995), https://jamestown.org/program/russias-ominous-new-military-doctrine/ (accessed June 30, 2017); Robert Brannon, *Russian Civil-Military Relations* (Burlington: Ashgate, 2009), Appendix A.

the December 1993 Duma elections. The LDP's ideal Russia was an explicitly imperial state, reincorporating the territories of the former USSR and eventually expanding to the Indian Ocean, which would allow it to confronts threats from both the West and revived pan-Turkism.[129] Though impractical politically, the LDP's platform was a heuristic of a political current that led Yeltsin to define a special Russian prerogative in the Near Abroad. After Kozyrev was dismissed in 1995, a more interventionist policy became standardized.[130] In September of that year, Yeltsin announced to the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS) states that Russia had an interest in ensuring the treatment of ethnic Russians outside its borders and called for tighter integration of the CIS as a bloc with a particular post-Soviet identity. His new foreign minister Viktor Chernomyrdin followed this up in 1996 by declaring the CIS countries to be a zone of Russia's vital interests.[131]

However, throughout the rest of the decade, Russia remained disinclined to use either the Abkhaz or Ossetians as proxies to project influence. Its goals may have been more assertive than in the immediate post-Soviet period, but they were not yet revisionist. This was reflected in the conflicts' diplomatic processes, particularly in South Ossetia where Russia had more influence. Western organizations increased their influence in the regions with Moscow's blessing. The Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) established a Mission to Georgia in 1992 and by 1994 it was officially recognized as part of the JCC mechanism. The OSCE assisted with meetings in 1994,

[129] Nicole Jackson, *Russian Foreign Policy and the CIS: Theories, debates, and actions* (New York: Routledge, 2003), 42-43.
[130] Laitin, 103.
[131] Jan Adams, "The Dynamics of Integration: Russia and the Near Abroad," *Demokratizatsiya* 6, no. 1 (Winter 1998), 59.

1995, and 1996, the same year the two sides released a diplomatic document (the "Memorandum") illustrating the way forwards. In the Memorandum, both the Georgians and the South Ossetians renounced the use of force to solve their dispute, reduce peacekeeping forces in the area, and continue discussions.[132] In the spirit of the Memorandum agreement, Georgian President Shevardnadze conducted three summit meetings with his *de facto* South Ossetian counterpart Ludwig Chibirov from 1996-1998, and trade between the two parties also began to increase.[133] In 1999, a working-level group was set up between the two sides to negotiate in earnest the details of a final settlement, which appeared to be within reach.

The Abkhaz proved more resistant to Russian desires, but here also Moscow attempted to play a positive role. The CIS formalized the West's political interests in the conflict through the "Friends of Georgia" group organization, which included the major European powers plus the US and which was codified in the peacemaking process by 1997. But Abkhazia's autonomy was more developed historically and politically than South Ossetia's, which may have contributed to less Russian control (illustrated, among other things, by the multiple failed cease-fires). When Abkhaz and Russian goals clashed, Yeltsin was willing to apply pressure. For example, in response to Shevardnadze's urging, Russia and eleven other CIS countries imposed trade and military sanctions on Abkhazia in January 1996.[134]

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[132] "Memorandum on Measures of Providing Safety and Strengthening of Mutual Confidence Between the Sides in the Georgian-Ossetian Conflict" (May 16, 1996), http://sojcc.ru/eng_news/271.html (accessed on July 25, 2015).
[133] Fact-Finding Mission, 98.
[134] Vladimir Socor, "Moscow "Lifts" The Economic Sanctions on Abkhazia," *Eurasia Daily Monitor* 5, issue 44 (March 7, 2008), https://jamestown.org/program/moscow-lifts-the-economic-sanctions-on-abkhazia/ (accessed May 31, 2017).

In his twilight years, Yeltsin accelerated the ideological shift towards defending Russia's prerogative in the regions that had begun in 1995. Perhaps his most consequential decision was the anointment of a successor, Vladimir Putin, whose ideology and worldview would become synonymous with Russia's own. At the start, Putin's vision did not seem to deviate from Yeltsin's. He was a colorless, somewhat banal apparatchik with ties to the security services, which may have made him the perfect second fiddle.[135] Putin portrayed himself as above ideology, above the partisan fray, pragmatically borrowing ideas from systems that worked.[136] He gave a lukewarm endorsement to the pro-government Unity party in Russia's 1999 parliamentary elections because he was reportedly friendly with some of its members.[137] In 2000 Putin published the first expression of his political ideology in an article entitled *Russia at the Turn of the Millennium*, in which he specifically warned against danger of ideology. For the West, *Millennium* was a largely reassuring document, stressing the need for economic reform and investment in the population. He lauded the value of patriotism, free of "nationalist conceit" and "imperial ambitions," and solemnly recognized that "In the present world the might of a country as a great power is manifested more in...upholding its interests in the international arena than in its military might."

Where were these interests? Russia, said Putin, was a great power "preconditioned by the inseparable characteristics of its geopolitical, economic and cultural existence. They determined the mentality of Russians and the policy of the

[135] Lilia Shevtsova, *Putin's Russia* (Washington, DC: Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, 2005), 33, 61.
[136] Fiona Hill and Clifford Gaddy, *Mr. Putin, Operative in the Kremlin* (Washington, DC: Brookings Institution Press, 2015), 130.
[137] Shevtsova, 46.

government throughout the history of Russia and they cannot but do so at present." It mentioned, in passing, that Russian power was at its lowest point in 200-300 years, or since the beginning of Russia's imperial expansion under Peter the Great.[138] Over the next decade, Putin would amalgamate "great power" Russians into his political coalition. He did this through cooption of nationalist ideologues like Zhirinovsky of the LDP and appeals to historical symbols and themes that resonated with the common man of Russia.[139] Some of these symbolic changes hinted at a change in Russia's conception of itself. Putin changed the state's national anthem back to its Soviet-era variant in December 2000 and the Russian military's insignia back to the red star in 2002. A key ideologist close by his side during this period was Vladislav Surkov, who served as Putin's key political strategist and propagandist.[140] He coined the term "sovereign democracy" to describe Putin's rule, describing a statist, great-power system which had some democratic garnishments but was at its heart a noncompetitive system for the Kremlin.[141] Surkov would help develop the concept of a new greater Russian imperial state, a "Third Rome," and like Rome combining the cultural and religious trappings of legitimacy into an expansive project.[142] Above all, this meant a privileged Russian position – if not dominance – in its near abroad.

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[138] Vladimir Putin, "Russia at the Turn of the Millennium" (December 31, 1999), http://en.kremlin.ru/-events/president/transcripts/22280 (accessed June 14, 2017).
[139] Hill and Gaddy, 252.
[140] S.P. Roberts, *Putin's United Russia Party* (New York: Routledge, 2012), 62.
[141] Ken Jowitt, "Rus United," in Ronald J. Hill, Ottorini Cappelli, eds. *Putin and Putinism* (New York: Routledge, 2010), 25; "An ideologue's exit: What the departure of Vladimir Surkov means for the government," *The Economist* (May 11, 2013), http://www.economist.com/news/europe/21577421-what-departure-vladislav-surkov-means-government-ideologues-exit (accessed June 20, 2017).
[142] Edward Lucas, *The New Cold War: Putin's Russia and the Threat to the West* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014), 158.

II. The Conflict

A Less and Less Honest Broker, 2000-2003

Russia began to increase both its control over South Ossetia's government and its conventional military operations across the Georgian border in 2000. Its motivation was prodded by the eruption of the second Chechen War and the Rose Revolution, both of which as well as the ethnic geography of South Ossetia helped Russia avoid censure.

Russia's first move was to align South Ossetia's goals with its own and increase its control over the proxy government. During South Ossetia's elections presidential elections to replace Chibirov in 2000-2001, Moscow hand-picked Eduard Kokoity after convening a meeting of the three leading candidates in Russia in February 2001.[143] Kokoity was a former militia leader with ties to the Russian security services and had been living in Moscow before the election. He was also a member of an explicitly imperial Russian activist group founded by Alexander Dugin, a semi-fascist advisor to pro-government members of the Duma.[144] The region's former president Ludwig Chibirov had been supportive of negotiations with Georgia, including a final status settlement that potentially included South Ossetia under Georgian sovereignty. Kokoity was not. He abandoned discussing South Ossetia's status within a Georgian framework, and demanded unification with North Ossetia in the Russian Federation.[145]

During this period, Moscow also blurred Georgian sovereignty over the regions with a passport drive. This was helpful for power projection, since Russia's military

[143] Andrei Illarionov, "The Russian Leadership's Preparation for War, 1999-2008," in *The Guns of August: Russia's War in Georgia,* ed. Svante E. Cornell and S. Frederick Starr (Armonk: M.E. Sharpe, 2009), 52.
[144] Toal, 140.
[145] Nathalie Tocci, *The EU and Conflict Resolution: Promoting Peace in the Backyard* (New York: Routledge, 2007), 138.

support of the South Ossetians relied on the use of its conventional forces and the ease with which they could operate without the censure of interstate war. Blurring national boundaries would increase that ease. Though its official position was still that South Ossetia and Abkhazia were part of a sovereign Georgia, Moscow changed its citizenship requirements in June 2002 to make it easier for Abkhaz and Ossetians (among others) to register for Russian passports. Groups like the Congress of Russina Communities of Abkhazia assisted with the wholesale registration of Abkhaz and Ossetians, resulting in an estimated seventy percent of the population of Abkhazia holding Russian citizenship.[146] South Ossetia's deputy prime minister was eventually able to say that 98 percent of South Ossetian citizens carried Russian passports.[147] This had the function of blurring Georgia's sovereignty and thus eroding the norm against military intervention, since there was now a quasi-legal basis for bringing Russian conventional power to bear in their support. Russian authorities, including the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, stated several times that Russia would act to protect Russian citizens in South Ossetia with "all means available," especially in the face of Georgian military actions.[148]

Why was Russia support for South Ossetia changing? One factor may have been NATO's expansion into former Soviet space. In a statement released in May 2000, the Baltic States and several other formerly communist countries had declared their intent to seek NATO membership.[149] The curious thing, however, was that Russia's support for

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[146] Inal Khashig, "Abkhaz Snap up Russian Passports, *The Moscow Times* (July 1, 2002).
[147] Natalia Portyakova, Vladimir Novikov, and Dzerasa Biazarti, "Explosion Redirected," *Kommersant* (July 10, 2006), http://www.kommersant.com/p688852/r_1/Explosion_Redirected/ (accessed July 29, 2008).
[148] Tracey German, "Securing the South Caucasus: Military Aspects of Russian Policy towards the Region since 2008," *Europe-Asia Studies* 64, no. 9 (November 2012): 1653-1654.
[149] Vilnius Statement, at "NATO's Role in the Changing Security Environment in Europe," Conference in Vilnius, Lithuania (May 18-19, 2000), http://www.mfa.gov.lv/en/security-policy/co-operation-with-nato-

South Ossetia increased even before it publicly identified NATO or the Vilnius Round as a threat – indeed, before the issue of Georgia entering the alliance had been raised at all. Preoccupied with the small war in Chechnya, the Kremlin did not appear to be rattled by the Vilnius statement. Indeed, most Russian defense writing during this period stressed the need to focus on counterterrorism and unconventional conflicts like the one Russia was fighting. Putin himself had earlier abjured the need to match NATO's conventional and nuclear capabilities.[150] Only later, in 2003, did Russia's defense planning start to change. Russia's defense ministry issued a white paper that year outlining the new Ivanov doctrine, after his defense minister Sergei Ivanov, which called on the Russian military to be able to fight a full spectrum of potential conflicts including peer-to-peer and nuclear war.[151]

However, Russia's evolving policy towards Georgia and its strategic worldview were related to regional issues in the Caucasus. The Chechen war soured bilateral relations with Georgia. By 2000, Moscow had become frustrated with Tbilisi's stance on Chechnya. Kremlin officials felt Georgia was giving a free pass for militants to travel through the Pankisi Gorge linking the two countries. They did have cause for concern. Undoubtedly the heavily mountainous border was difficult to monitor; but also undoubtedly, some Georgian authorities turned a blind eye to separatist activity.

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member-states-and-candidate-countries/conference-nato-s-role-in-the-changing-security-environment-in-europe-vilnius-statement (accessed June 21, 2017).

[150] Stephen Blank, "A New Russian Defense Doctrine?" *UNISCI UNISCI Discussion Papers* no. 12 (October 2005), https://www.ucm.es/data/cont/media/www/pag-72529/UNISCIBlank12.pdf, (accessed June 24, 2017), 154.

[151] Matthew Bouldin, "The Ivanov Doctrine and Military Reform: Reasserting Stability in Russia," *The Journal of Slavic Military Studies* (August 10, 2010), 619-641; Blank, 157.

Accounts by Chechen militants confirm it.[152] The issue was made more complicated by the fact that some Chechens like Shamil Basayev had fought for the Abkhaz during their first conflict in the early 1990's. This problem began to sour Russian-Georgian cooperation in the JCC and other working groups.[153] If Georgia was not part of the solution to Russia's number one security concern, then it was part of the problem.

Politically, Chechnya was made more imperative for Russia by the change in its leadership. Russia had committed at the OSCE in November 1999 to pull troops out of the Gudauta base in Abkhazia, as well as the Batumi base in Adjara and the Akhalkalaki base in Georgia proper. But Putin had benefited politically from a strong stance on the Chechen war, using earthy language like "wipe out the Chechen thugs wherever they are, right up to the last shithouse."[154] He portrayed decisiveness and toughness, which boosted his approval ratings to over 75 percent in 2001.[155] Anything that interfered with his toughness on the Chechens and terrorism was a threat to Putin himself and thus Russia. And particularly after the terrorist attacks against the United States in 2001, Putin received significant leeway in his conduct of the war.

Adjacent to Georgia and nearly touching South Ossetia, the Chechen war further helped to normalize Russian cross-border military operations just like the passport drive. In addition to increasing support for the Ossetians, Russia began to conduct airstrikes in

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[152] See, for example, Aukai Collins, *My Jihad: The True Story of an American Mujahid's Amazing Journey* (Guilford: Lyons Press, 2002), and Ilyas Akhmadov and Miriam Lanskoy, *The Chechen Struggle: Independence Won and Lost* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010).
[153] For example, "Russia Again Castigates Georgia for Failing to Intercept Chechen Militants," *Radio Free Europe* (September 27, 1999), http://www.rferl.org/content/article/1142000.html (accessed on June 20, 2015).
[154] Allen Lynch, *Vladimir Putin and Russian Statecraft* (Washington, DC: Potomac Books, 2011), 58-59.
[155] "Vladimir Putin's approval rating at record levels," *The Guardian* (July 23, 2015), https://www.theguardian.com/world/datablog/2015/jul/23/vladimir-putins-approval-rating-at-record-levels (accessed June 14, 2017).

Pankisi in 2002 using the rhetoric of fighting terrorism.[156] Instead of condemning the attacks, the United States warned that Pankisi was becoming a refuge for international terrorist networks linked to al-Qaeda.[157] It sent military aid and training personnel to Georgia in 2002 specifically to help it combat these terrorist groups. President George Bush and Putin released a joint statement in May of that year committing to fight terrorism "wherever it may occur," with a special mention to eliminating terrorists in Georgia.[158] Russia also continually refused to allow an international border-monitoring mission even though it complained bitterly about the presence of Chechen militants. Freedom of movement for Russia's conventional forces appeared to be more important.

Moscow's support of the South Ossetians also increased at a time when Georgia's foreign policy orientation had not undergone any significant shifts nor had Russia itself been particularly isolated. During his decade in power, Shevardnadze's government had pursued both a conciliatory line with Moscow and a relatively patient approach towards South Ossetia.[159] But after parliamentary elections in November 2003 were marred by accusations of fraud, a series of increasingly massive nonviolent protests forced Shevardnadze's resignation.[160] Georgians went to the polls again in January and elected Mikhail Saakashvili, who was determined to both reorient Georgia with the West and reclaim his country's lost territories.[161]

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[156] Toal, 110.
[157] Neil Arun, "Russia's reach unnerves Chechens," *BBC* (January 16, 2008), http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/europe/7189024.stm (accessed June 29).
[158] Administration of George W. Bush, *Joint Statement by President George Bush and President Vladimir Putin on Counterterrorism Cooperation* (Washington, DC: Government Publishing Office, May 24, 2002), 899.
[159] Stephen Blank, "From Neglect to Duress: The West and the Georgian Crisis before the 2008 War," in *The Guns of August: Russia's War in Georgia,* ed. Svante E. Cornell and S. Frederick Starr (Armonk: M.E. Sharpe, 2009), 108.
[160] Charles H. Fairbanks, "Georgia's Rose Revolution," *Journal of Democracy* 15, 2 (April 2004): 116.
[161] Asmus, 57.

However, his election was a mixed blessing for Georgia. Certainly Saakashvili spoke of modernizing Georgia and accelerating the state-building process that had stalled under Shevardnadze. But he quickly came to be viewed as a hothead, impetuous, which had the effect of muting international blame for Russian aggression. Under Saakashvili Georgia made a priority of solving the remaining conflicts. His hawkish defense minister Irakli Okruashvili promised to resign from the cabinet if South Ossetia – his birthplace – was not regained by 2007.[162] The trouble was that once the status quo was thrown into turmoil, violations of it by either side would not be as harshly punished. Thus, as the separatist conflicts accelerated, as much American and European energy was spent warning Saakashvili not to do anything stupid as was spent pressuring Russia.

At first, his haste proved promising. The success of the government's policy on reintegrating Adjara, an autonomous area on the southwestern tip of Georgia, seemed to indicate that Russia would cooperate. Apparently trying to mimic their success in the Rose Revolution, demonstrators and activists from Georgian nationalist movements began a grassroots campaign calling for its leader Aslan Abashidze's ouster.[163] Following a period of popular demonstrations and Georgian pressure, Abashidze fled to Moscow in May 2004.

Why didn't Russia intervene in Adjara, the way it would later? There was certainly less of an historic tradition of autonomy for the area, and no real ethnic animosity between the Adjaran residents and Georgians. It was also more difficult operationally: Adjara was not contiguous by land with Russia, which would have

[162] Pål Kolstø and Helge Blakkisrud, "Living with Non-recognition: State- and Nation-building in South Caucasian Quasi-states," *Europe-Asia Studies* 60, no. 3 (May 1, 2008), 72-73.
[163] Niklas Nilsson, "Georgia's Rose Revolution: A Break With the Past," in *The Guns of August: Russia's War in Georgia,* ed. Svante E. Cornell and S. Frederick Starr (Armonk: M.E. Sharpe, 2009), 91.

impeded additional support for the separatist government. Russia's preferred style of proxy war functioned best with territorial contiguity that would minimize logistical challenges and worst with clear separation between combatants, which would raise the visibility of military support (and thus lower Russia's deniability) as well as impose more operational difficulties.

Saakashvili had also not yet begun to take concrete measures to change his broader foreign policy. His inauguration speech on January 25 had praised the United States but also stressed his desire for good relations with Russia and indeed with "all friendly states." He emphasized that Georgia's borders included all of the disputed areas, but did not mention the EU or NATO.[164] When Saakashvili met Putin on February 11, Putin acknowledged that Adjara could be resolved but asked Saakashvili to allow Russia to retain its bases in the region.[165] Russia maintained a major military base in Batumi on Georgia's Black Sea coast that housed about 3,000-6,000 troops in 2004.[166]

Before the summer of 2004, Saakashvili's only overtures to the West had been a March 2004 agreement to allow NATO military aircraft heading to Afghanistan transit rights over Georgia. He had also visited Brussels in April, though no questions of Georgian accession had been raised. The Orange Revolution in Ukraine could not come for another six months. Kosovo's independence was not certain or sanctioned by the international community. True, the Vilnius Group of Baltic and formerly communist

[164] "President Saakashvili's Inauguration Speech," *Civil Georgia* (January 25, 2004), http://www.civil.ge/eng/article.php?id=26694 (accessed June 4, 2017).
[165] Illarionov, 55.
[166] David Darchiashvili, "Georgian Defense Policy and Military Reform," in *Statehood and Security: Georgia After the Rose Revolution*, ed. Bruno Coppieters and Robert Legvold (Cambridge: MIT Press, 2005), 133.

countries had joined NATO only a month before. But that had been coming for several years, and had not yet elicited a major response from the Kremlin.

Drawing the Line, 2004-2006

Russia followed the resolution of the Adjara conflict by dramatically increasing support to the militants in South Ossetia and Abkhazia in the spring of 2004. This period coincided with the beginning of Putin's second term in office. Russia's goals during this period became increasingly defensive, hyperprotective of Russia's territory and the product of a state that saw itself as more and more besieged. These goals were twofold. First, prevent any future revolutions, especially in Moscow. This was broader than Georgia but shaped the second goal, to keep Russia together. Prevent any future Chechnyas. Prevent them even if that meant projecting forward, beyond Russia's borders, to grab more territory, rather than protect what it had. Protect the existing autonomous areas in places like Georgia as forward defense, to keep the pressure off Russian territory and bolster other communities that looked to Russia for support.

There were essentially two types of threats to Russia. First was the big threat, the color revolution in the capital that had claimed Russian-friendly regimes in Georgia, Ukraine, and Kyrgyzstan. These had been celebrated by the West and conceptually posed a threat to Russia at home. Putin and his administration began to view Western NGOs as agents seeking to bring down his regime and encourage color revolutions abroad. His foreign minister Sergei Lavrov elaborated this theme in a journal article when he complained about foreigners "imposing double standards on other countries

when assessing their election processes and the state of civil rights and freedoms."[167] Putin's ideology was hardening into something like Surkov's vision, complete with a traditionally Russian buffer zone of neutral countries in the Near Abroad.[168] Later that year, Putin famously described the collapse of the USSR as the "major geopolitical disaster of the century."[169] Linked to this was the second threat, the gradual chewing off of pieces of a still-undefined Russia through separatist conflicts like Chechnya. The Chechen war was in fact coming under control, and indeed Putin's strong hand in subduing the Chechens had been popular politically. Putin's government had learned that war worked when it worked. Putin himself had not made his view on South Ossetia public during the Adjara crisis in 2004. After it was over, he called Saakashvili to tell him "…we did not intervene in Adjara, but you won't have any gifts from us in South Ossetia and Abkhazia."[170] By the fall, a more defensive, more hostile approach to the West and the near abroad had clearly emerged. After the Beslan terrorist attack on a school in September 2004, Putin addressed the nation and said "Some would like to tear from us "a juicy piece of pie. Others help them. They help, reasoning that Russia still remains one of the world's major nuclear powers, and as such still represents a threat to them."[171] Voices among the military and private industry were also urging full support

[167] Sergei Lavrov, "Democracy, International Governance, and the Future World Order," *Russia in Global Affairs* no. 1 (February 9, 2005), http://eng.globalaffairs.ru/number/n_4422 (accessed June 2, 2017).
[168] Marlene Laruelle, "Putin's Regime and the Ideological Market: A Difficult Balancing Game," *Task Force on U.S. Policy Towards Russia, Ukraine, and Eurasia,* Carnegie Endowment for International Peace (March 16, 2017), http://carnegieendowment.org/2017/03/16/putin-s-regime-and-ideological-market-difficult-balancing-game-pub-68250 (accessed July 1, 2017).
[169] Toal, 55.
[170] "Saakashvili's Account of Events that Led to Conflict," *Civil Georgia* (August 25, 2008), http://www.-civil.ge/eng/article.php?id=19282 (accessed on June 20, 2015).
[171] "Address by Vladimir Putin" (September 4, 2004), http://en.kremlin.ru/events/president/transcripts/-22589 (accessed June 11, 2017).

for the separatists.[172] And since it was trying to keep the separatist region alive and not yet use it as a spoiler for Georgia's NATO aspirations, Russian goals and South Ossetian goals appeared to be in perfect alignment. Survive.

Operationally, this meant increased ties to the remaining regions in Georgia to prevent them from going the same way as Adjara. Days after Abashidze's flight, the Kremlin issued an order to construct additional military bases in South Ossetia, both in Tskhinvali and north towards the town of Java. It initiated a training program for South Ossetians at its military academy in North Ossetia and increased the number of Russian trainers on the ground in the south. Most critically, on May 25, Russia began accelerating the issuance of Russian passports to South Ossetians. In early June, the Kremlin sent the separatists a large military shipment of heavy equipment, including tanks and self-propelled artillery.[173]

These moves coincided with the Georgian government launching a major effort to achieve an Adjara-style coup in South Ossetia.[174] This began with the construction in May of a road linking ethnically Georgian villages bypassing Tskhinvali and a major anti-smuggling campaign. On May 31, Georgia helicoptered troops to three Georgian villages adjacent to South Ossetia and one inside it in an attempt to shut down the major smuggling market at Ergneti, on the region's border.[175] This eliminated trade worth up to $35 million and disrupted a key source of revenue for the separatist government.[176] Alarmed by the sudden action on their doorstep, Russian authorities issued a statement

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[172] Shevtsova, 382.
[173] Illarionov, 56.
[174] Vladimir Socor, "South Ossetia: an Issue Between Tbilisi and Moscow," *Eurasia Daily Monitor* 1, is. 58 (July 22, 2004), http://www.jamestown.org/single/?tx_ttnews%5Btt_news%5D=26652&no_cache=1#.Vbju785hPlI (accessed May 28, 2015).
[175] Zürcher, 91.
[176] Zürcher, 91.

threatening war. Clashes between civilians, Georgian troops, Ossetian militias, and Russian peacekeepers broke out in June and escalated through July. Georgia accused Russia directly of arming the South Ossetians, and seized two Russian military trucks containing an estimated 300 air-to-surface missiles on July 7.[177] The Russians and Ossetians responded by capturing 50 Georgian peacekeepers in a raid the next day and filming them on their knees for Russian television.[178] Neither the United States nor the European Union issued a strong protest against the Russian actions. Quite the opposite: they came down against Georgia, and Saakashvili accumulated more of a reputation as a hothead. U.S. Secretary of State Colin Powell gave him a tongue-lashing over the incident when he made a trip to the United States in late July.[179] Nor did the OSCE monitors in place condemn the reports of increased Russian aid. The violence subsided at a meeting of the JCC in August with essentially a return to the status quo ante.[180]

At the same time, Russia began to expand its control of the separatists' security forces at the operational level. Russia already had long-standing ties to the Ossetian political leadership – indeed, it had stage-managed Kokoity's election. But this control now deepened into the security sector. The wave of security replacements came not when Russia was in the depths of the Chechen war, but after the summer crisis in South Ossetia when Saakashvili's economic and political initiatives to regain the territories were underway. South Ossetia's vulnerability to Adjara-like coups, where a mini-Rose Revolution had toppled Abashidze, was also apparent. Indeed, the personnel selected all

[177] ICG, *Avoiding War in South Ossetia*, 13-14.
[178] "South Ossetia Releases Georgian Peacekeepers," *Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty* (July 29, 2016), http://www.rferl.org/content/article/1053767.html (accessed May 27, 2015).
[179] Toal, 148.
[180] Illarionov, 57.

had extensive experience in counterinsurgency and counterterrorism, most in the North Caucasus. Many had served in Chechnya or Afghanistan or both. Anatoly Barankevich, for example, was made secretary of the Security Council in 2006 after four years as the first deputy military commissioner in Chechnya and service in Afghanistan. Anatoly Yaravoy, the former head of the FSB in Mordavia, was appointed chief of the South Ossetian KGB in January 2005. He was replaced in March 2006 by a Russian FSB colonel who was himself replaced in November by Boris Atoyev, another Russian FSB officer and Afghanistan veteran. Mikhail Mindzayev, an Ossetian and former official in Russia's Ministry of the Interior in North Ossetia and commando leader of the KGB's elite Alpha teams during the Beslan siege, was appointed the Minister of Interior in April 2005.[181] The head of the border guards was also replaced. The most incongruous of Russia's selections was the most telling. In March 2008, South Ossetia appointed as defense minister Vasili Lunev, a Russian major general and military advisor in Syria.[182] He was by far the highest-ranking Russian security officer integrated into the South Ossetian hierarchy, was not ethnically Ossetian, and was with the regular army, not the FSB. The personnel decisions made during this period expanded Russia's control over the operational capabilities of South Ossetia, helping turn separatist forces into a military lever with less political liability than Russian forces. There was little international notice taken about these appointments. The only United States statement came on the political side, after Kokoity was reelected in November 2006 with an improbable 98 percent

[181] Carmen Gayoso, "The Promulgation of Anti-Democratic Norms in South Ossetia," in *International Dimensions of Authoritarian Persistence: Lessons from Post-Soviet States*, ed. Rachel Vanderhill (Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield, 2013), 111.
[182] "Russians in South Ossetian Separatist Government," *Georgia Update* (2008) http://georgiaupdate.gov.ge/en/tagliavini/15c7ac9f9e93192bc30fbeaecc87c70b/d47fb18b456b1f8392cb799b18529463/ce7e6bfd37d3b88e21caf283046a92b0 (accessed June 30, 2017).

support and a similar mandate for South Ossetian independence. In response, the US said merely that the vote would "exacerbate tensions."[183] The EU said something similarly weak, suggesting that Kokoity's election and the referendum would not contribute to resolving the conflict peacefully.[184]

Russia's ability to deepen its military ties to its proxies without significant external opposition was aided by the ethnic geography of South Ossetia. The threat of ethnic violence served to legitimize the presence of foreign troops as peacekeepers, and the threat was magnified by the patchwork of communities in South Ossetia. The intertwined geography of the ethnic layout increased the friction points and dyads of potential conflict. According to the Soviet census of 1989, the population of South Ossetia was about 99,700, including 65,000 Ossetians and 26,000 Georgians. As a result of the fighting, South Ossetia's population fell to about 70,000 people, of which about 20-30 percent was Georgian.[185] However, the pattern of returnees in the years following reinforced Ossetian control of Tskhinvali, with a patchwork of ethnic Georgian villages ringing the perimeter. By comparison, Georgian villages were scattered over several parts of South Ossetia.[186] This was an opportunity for the South Ossetians and their Russian sponsors, because isolated ethnic Georgians were exposed and thus the threshold for initiating violence – to which Georgia would be pressed to respond but which would probably not bring condemnation from the international community – was relatively low.

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[183] U.S. Department of State Press Statement, "Rejecting the 'Independence Referendum' and Elections in Georgia's South Ossetia Region" (November 8, 2006), https://2001-2009.state.gov/r/pa/prs/ps/2006/75705.htm (accessed June 28, 2017).
[184] "International Community Will Not Recognize South Ossetia Vote," *Radio Free Europe/Radio Free Liberty* (November 13, 2006), https://www.rferl.org/a/1072687.html (accessed April 2, 2020).
[185] "Up In Flames: Humanitarian Law Violations and Civilian Victims in the Conflict over South Ossetia," *Human Rights Watch Report* (January 2009), 16, https://www.hrw.org/sites/default/files/reports/-georgia0109web.pdf (accessed June 28, 2017).
[186] ICG, *Avoiding War in South Ossetia*, 5-6.

They were not huddled across a semi-major border the way they were in Abkhazia. It also meant that Georgian forces would always be forced to be on the offensive, to reach and defend outlying villages. Georgia went to great lengths to alleviate this by attempting to build bypass roads to reach isolated communities. These efforts in turn permitted more direct Russian involvement, since the role of Moscow's proxies and military could be portrayed as essentially defensive. Indeed, that is how the military standoff in 2004 and the later August War ultimately began.

However, in 2004, Russia had still reason to be concerned about keeping its proxy states viable, as Saakashvili continued to push reintegration through several different channels. Later in the year he launched a major diplomatic initiative aimed at the South Ossetian government with a detailed peace proposal he laid out to the UN. It focused on the resettlement of refugees, demilitarization of the conflict zones, and then final status discussions, as well as an international security presence at the Roki Tunnel.[187] This sequential offering was also the basis for his speech to the Council of Europe a few months later, which included guarantees for the Ossetian language, property claim settlements, and more detail on the proposed level of autonomy for South Ossetia.[188] He also offered a conference in Batumi the next year, which the South Ossetians ignored.

In late 2004, Georgia also began to call for reform of the peacekeeping mechanisms in the regions and in particular the function of the JCC. Its complaints included Russia's relationship to the Ossetian militias, the irreparably flawed nature of

[187] United Nations General Assembly 59th Session, *Remarks by H.E. Mikheil Saakashvili – President of Georgia* (September 21, 2004), http://www.un.org/webcast/ga/59/statements/geoeng040921.pdf (accessed on July 1, 2015).
[188] Council of Europe, *Address by Mikhail Saakashvili, President of Georgia* (January 26, 2005), http://www.coe.int/T/E/Com/Files/PA-Sessions/janv-2005/saakashvili.pdf (accessed on June 15, 2015).

the JCC, and the hundreds of "mercenary" Cossack volunteers operating in the combat zone.[189] This effort was followed by others. On October 11, 2005, the Georgian parliament passed a resolution condemning the operations of Russian peacekeepers and calling for them to be replaced if there had been no improvement by July 2006. Saakashvili's government urged action on that request on October 27 at a meeting of the OSCE Permanent Council, where the Georgian prime minister offered a new framework for conflict mediation disputes. The Americans welcomed the initiative, but it was rejected by Russia and the Ossetians.[190] The US, however, explicitly warned Georgia not to push too hard for changes to the constitution of the peacekeeping forces, which it felt might be destabilizing.[191] Tbilisi would revisit this issue diplomatically again on March 1, 2008, when again the Russians rejected the proposal out of hand, as did the Ossetians. US and EU opinion still opposed taking more decisive diplomatic action with regards to the status of the Russian peacekeepers.[192]

With the diplomatic process stalled and the JCC framework providing cover for Russian troops, Saakashvili turned to yet another approach: proxy warfare of his own. Georgia's favored proxy leader was Dmitry Sanakoyev, a former militia commander whom Georgia was promoting as an alternative Ossetian leader.[193] He administered the Georgian-held areas of South Ossetia from the town of Kurta using his own security

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[189] ICG, *Avoiding War in South Ossetia*, 16.
[190] Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe, *Presentation " South Ossetia Conflict Resolution Plan" by the Prime Minister of Georgia, H.E. Zurab Nogaideli* (October 27, 2005), http://www.osce.org/-documents/pc/2005/10/16791_en.pdf (accessed on June 15, 2015); U.S. Department of State Press Statement, "Plan for a Peaceful Settlement in the South Ossetia Conflict" (October 8, 2005), https://2001-2009.state.gov/r/pa/prs/ps/2005/55768.htm (accessed June 2, 2017).
[191] Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe, *Response to Mr. Gela Bezhuashvili, Foreign Minister of Georgia, as delivered by Ambassador Julie Finley* (February 9, 2006), http://www.osce.org/pc/18083?download=true (accessed May 10, 2015).
[192] Blank, 131.
[193] Kolstø and Blakkisrud, 504.

forces, administrators, and ministerial council. Georgia turned over to him functional governance of its areas of South Ossetia through a parliamentary motion on May 8, 2007, and supported his nominal administration with infrastructure projects and economic aid.[194]

Ultimately, Georgia's proxy warfare was unsuccessful not because its ally could not develop the same material capabilities as Russia's but because those capabilities had little relevance to its success. If its proxy were able to exert sufficient military and political pressure on the South Ossetian separatists, and reduce their military capabilities, it would still be irrelevant, because military capability was not the primary function of the separatists. Their primary function was to reduce the international cost of deploying Russia's overwhelming military advantage, not to fight on their own. The South Ossetians gave Moscow's conventional forces an opportunity to be present in South Ossetia and sustain a low level of violence. It was through those forces – and the threat of Russia bringing to bear its overall overwhelming conventional superiority – that Russia extended its influence and imposed its policy preferences. Georgia's forces had no such conventional superiority at the upper levels of escalation. In addition, no matter how strong the Georgian proxies became, they were not included in the decade-long processes of the JCC. The legacy weight of this institution and the near impossibility of revising it made including the new party unlikely.

Intensification, 2006-2008

[194] International Crisis Group, *Georgia's South Ossetia Conflict: Make Haste Slowly*, Europe Report N°183, 7 (June 7, 2007), 5, 8 http://www.crisisgroup.org/~/media/Files/europe/183_georgia_s_south_ossetia_co-nflict_make_haste_slowly.ashx (accessed July 20, 2015).

Russia's posture began to shift again in 2006. It had been deeply shaken by the Velvet Revolution in Ukraine, even more than the Georgian revolution the year before, and increasingly it was focused on the need to prevent further NATO encroachment in the east. In June, Lavrov gave a speech to the Duma saying that the global balance of power would undergo a "colossal" shift if Ukraine and Georgia joined NATO, the strongest opposition to the idea by a senior Russian official to date. He told US officials privately the move would "destroy" bilateral relations.[195] The Duma dutifully passed a resolution condemning the idea.[196] At the next year's Munich security conference Putin himself blasted NATO expansion to Georgia and Ukraine, threatening an arms race and condemning US global leadership.[197] This shift was exacerbated by Russian concerns about Western policy in the Balkans. During a press conference on January 31, 2006, Putin linked the status of Abkhazia and South Ossetia to that of Kosovo, where the West had intervened militarily to establish Kosovar autonomy.[198] Two years later, the US and its allies went further and recognized Kosovar independence. To Moscow, Kosovo was a symbol not just of Russian prestige in supporting Serbia's claims to the territory, but also the West's willingness to double-deal on the issue of national sovereignty. In a subsequent interview with newspaper journalists, Putin further argued that the Abkhazia and South Ossetia cases were no different than Kosovo: i.e., that Kosovo was not a one-

[195] Robert Gates, *Duty: Memoirs of a Secretary at War* (New York: Penguin Random House, 2014), 167.
[196] "Russia warns Kiev over NATO plans," *BBC* (June 7, 2006), http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/europe/-5054506.stm (accessed June 25, 2017).
[197] Putin's Prepared Remarks at 43rd Munich Conference on Security Policy," *Washington Post* (February 12, 2007), http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2007/02/12/AR2007021200555.html (accessed August 2, 2015).
[198] "Transcript of the Press Conference for the Russian and Foreign Media," (January 31, 2006), http://en.kremlin.ru/events/president/transcripts/23412 (accessed June 8, 2017).

off, but a precedent for independence in the wake of collapsed empires.[199] Later on, Lavrov would repeatedly use this exceptionalism to justify Russia's approach to the world and use of force. He pointed to a "pragmatism," based on "the realities of life," with which Russia would address each issue individually.[200] One of these realities, of course, was that the principles applied to Western Europe would not be applied to countries that were more susceptible to pressure, like Georgia.

This changing strategic outlook implied more political and military support for the separatists and a harder line on final status issues. South Ossetia became even more intransigent about Georgian demands. The South Ossetian authorities had stalled all negotiations with the Georgians; they wanted status negotiations first, followed by everything else after, once their separateness was guaranteed. On April 26, 2006, the nominal South Ossetian parliament passed two resolutions, one asserting that genocide was perpetuated against its people from 1991-1992 and the other calling for recognition of the district's legal status at that time. Such recognition would codify South Ossetia's separateness, while offering Tbilisi no mechanism to contest it once relations had (presumably) improved later on. That position was a non-starter for Georgia.

Russian and separatist military attacks increased at the beginning of 2007 as well. However, these actions usually met a muted reaction. Despite being fairly brazen, they usually either escaped censure, or were met with milquetoast statements calling on both sides to deescalate. On March 11, 2007, Russian helicopters attacked Georgian

[199] "Interview with Newspaper Journalists from G8 Member Countries" (June 4, 2007), http://en.kremlin.ru/events/president/transcripts/24313 (accessed June 17, 2017).
[200] Sergei Lavrov, "The Present and the Future of Global Politics," *Russia in Global Affairs* no. 2 (May 13, 2007), http://eng.globalaffairs.ru/number/n_8554 (accessed June 11, 2017).

government buildings in Abkhazia.[201] In August, a Russian aircraft destroyed a radar station on the Georgian border. When confronted with evidence of the attack, Russia claimed Tbilisi faked it.[202] There was little enthusiasm from the West for examining the claims, even after international observers corroborated Georgia's story. The situation was made murkier by the ambiguous status of Russian peacekeeping forces which helped blur Russian transgressions. The OSCE declined to send an investigatory team and the EU decided not to blame either party. US spokesmen from the State Department and the White House made no comment.

Russia increased the pressure on the regions in 2008 after two diplomatic blows: final US recognition of Kosovo's independence, which came in early February, and the promise of NATO membership for Georgia and Ukraine in April at Bucharest. This was a goal that was important for President Bush. He had been taken with the color revolutions in Tbilisi and Kiev and had incorporated independence for Georgia and Ukraine into his freedom agenda. Georgia in particular had been supportive of the US-led war in Iraq, committing a brigade to support coalition operations with few national caveats on combat. Now several years on, Bush was strongly supportive of bringing the two countries into NATO. The first step would be a Membership Action Plan, or MAP, which would set out the needed reforms by Tbilisi in order to accede to the alliance. The MAP had been designed for formerly communist countries to help them join NATO, and offering MAP to Georgia and Ukraine would be a clear start to the accession process.

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[201] "UNOMIG Report on Kodori Attack," *Civil Georgia* (July 12, 2007), http://www.civil.ge/eng/article.php?id=15426 (accessed July 15, 2015).
[202] Misha Dzhindzhikhashvili, "Georgia: Russian Jet Fired Missile," *Associated Press* (August 8, 2007), http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2007/08/08/AR2007080800336_pf.html (accessed July 20, 2015).

However, the Europeans, particularly the Germans, had balked at extending NATO's Article V protections because of the separatist issue, as well as distrusting Saakashvili and his government.[203] A compromise was eventually agreed upon: that MAP would not be offered, but NATO would instead issue a statement saying that Georgia and Ukraine would eventually be members. In fact, this was the worst of all worlds. Georgia would lack the formal MAP link with NATO and the protection it implied, while incentivizing Russia to halt the accession, presumably by exacerbating European fears about being dragged into a war. Which it did.

In response, Moscow made a series of political and military counter-moves with the regions, clearly intended to tweak the West – and indeed, exacerbate Germany and others' fears about being dragged into a conflict. Russia lifted the remnant of the 1996 CIS-imposed sanctions on Abkhazia, enabling it to formally conduct the full range of normal contacts between states and deepen its economic ties. The decision also permitted Russia to send weapons to the separatist government.[204] On April 16, two weeks after the NATO meeting, Putin decreed that official contacts be created between Moscow and the breakaway provinces, which would mimic Moscow's relationship with its own member republics. This was met with protests by Western organizations including the NATO and the EU.[205] The US called these actions "provocative," urged Russia to facilitate meetings between the Abkhaz-Georgian meetings, and asked it to reaffirm support for Georgia's territorial integrity.[206]

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[203] Condoleezza Rice, *No Higher Honor: A Memoir of My Years in Washington* (New York: Random House, 2011), 673.
[204] "Georgia MFA Statement Against Lifting Abkhazia Sanctions," *Civil Georgia* (March 7, 2008), http:/-www.civil.ge/eng/article.php?id=17286 (accessed August 1, 2015).
[205] J. L. Black, *The Russian Presidency of Dmitry Medvedev, 2008-2012: The next step forward or merely a time out?* (New York: Routledge, 2015), 134.
[206] Press Briefing Dana Perino, May 6 2008

Russian military activity in the regions increased in 2008 as well, with less attention than its political gestures. Operating in the gray zone Russia had established, these often passed unopposed. On April 20, a Russian fighter aircraft shot down a Georgian drone over Abkhazia, an attack caught on the drone's camera and later verified by UNOMIG. Five more drones were shot down in May, and the Russian military announced it would prevent further Georgian unmanned aerial vehicles (UAVs) from patrolling the conflict areas.[207] After an investigation, the UN decided that Russia had indeed shot down the drone. No protest was made by the United States, OSCE, or UNOMIG. The disconnect between the lack of Western interest in Russia's military support as opposed to its political support highlighted Russia's strategic advantages in South Ossetia, and the gray area its proxies had helped carved out for its forces.

As spring turned into summer, the Russian military further expanded its presence in the separatist areas. These moves were shrouded by the legality of Russia's presence itself, via the peacekeeping arrangement, which sufficiently blurred the distinction of which forces were where to avoid – or at least quiet – any clear, agreed-upon violations of Georgian sovereignty. In May, Russia's leadership admitted that the number of its troops in Abkhazia had increased from 1,997 to 2,542. These included paratroopers, heavy equipment, and 400 railroad troops to improve the region's transport capabilities.[208] Some of these troops were later caught carrying proscribed anti-tank

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[207] Illarionov, 68-69.
[208] "Russia Gives Some Details On Troop Increase in Abkhazia," *Civil Georgia* (May 8, 2015), http://www.-civil.ge/eng/article.php?id=17786 (accessed July 29, 2015); Pavel Felgenhauer, "Russian Railroad Troops Complete Mission in Abkhazia," *Eurasia Daily Monitor* 5, iss. 146 (July 31, 2008), http://www.jamestown-.org/single/?tx_ttnews%5Btt_news%5D=33850&no_cache=1#.VcBGgs5hOFI (accessed August 4, 2015).

weapons and air-delivered missiles.[209] Russia claimed they were mostly part of a normal rotation, again citing the need to replace troops at its Gudauta base.[210] The US State Department said it was "dismayed" at the "Russian military buildup."[211] In July, however, even after provocative Russian military overflights of South Ossetia and near-daily combat incidents on the border, Secretary of State Rice remained seemingly equivocal during a visit to Georgia. She said that "some" of Russia's actions had increased tension in the region, and her department added that such actions "raised questions about Russia's role as peacekeeper and facilitator of the negotiations."[212] But after consultation with Germany, Rice urged Saakashvili to make a public pledge to abjure the use of force, a key Russian demand. He refused, pointing at the increased military provocations. In response, she told him bluntly that "no one" would help him in the event of a conflict.[213]

There was a strategic gap evident between the military reality on the ground, which was growing worse, and Saakashvili's international support, which declined as it did so. Moscow exploited this gap. In July, Russian troops from the North Caucasus Military District (NCMD) conducted major military exercises on Georgia's border in a simulated effort to protect Russian peacekeepers and citizens in an unnamed ex-Soviet republic. Many of these forces remained in the Caucasus when the exercise

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[209] "Peacekeepers Given Permission to Fight," *Kommersant* (June 20, 2008), http://www.kommersant.com-/p904347/Russian-Georgian_relations/ (accessed July 31, 2015).
[210] "Interior Minister Testifies Before War Commission," *Civil Georgia* (November 27, 2008), http://www-.civil.ge/eng/article.php?id=20032 (accessed August 4, 2015).
[211] "U.S. 'Dismayed' over more Russian Troops in Abkhazia," *Civil Georgia* (June 1, 2008)," http://www.civil.ge/eng/article.php?id=18449 (accessed June 24, 2017).
[212] U.S. Department of State, "Georgia: Escalation of Violence in South Ossetia and Abkhazia" (July 14, 2008), https://2001-2009.state.gov/r/pa/prs/ps/2008/07/106999.htm (accessed July 7, 2017).
[213] Blank, 116; U.S. Department of State, "Remarks En Route Prague, Czech Republic (July 8, 2008), https://2001-2009.state.gov/secretary/rm/2008/07/106642.htm (accessed April 11, 2020); Rice, 685-686.

concluded.[214] On July 20, an infantry battalion moved into the southern Kodori Gorge and South Ossetia's joint Russian and Ossetian peacekeeping battalions were also quietly augmented from 530 to 850 troops each.[215] By August 6, approximately 11,693 additional Russian soldiers and nearly 900 armored vehicles were stationed on the Russian side of the Roki tunnel, together with another 15,000 combat forces that ultimately intervened in Abkhazia.[216] The US made no statement on any of these movements.

The military pressure also came from South Ossetian militia forces. Tactically, they could easily focus their fire on the highly exposed roads between ethnically Georgian villages in South Ossetia without conducting larger, less deniable operations. On July 3, three Georgian policemen were injured when a remote controlled mine exploded near a convoy transporting the alternate president Sanakoyev on a bypass road around Tskhinvali.[217] The next day, Georgian and Ossetian forces exchanged fire between villages, killing one militiaman and a civilian.[218] Tit-for-tat shelling and detainments continued throughout the end of the month, with the South Ossetians allegedly using proscribed artillery (larger than 82 cm) for the first time.[219] On August 1, five Georgian policemen were again wounded on the bypass road around Tskhinvali

[214] Carolina Pallin and Fredrik Westerlund, "Russia's War in Georgia: lessons and consequences," in *Crisis in the Caucasus: Russia, Georgia, and the West*, ed. Paul B. Rich (New York: Routledge, 2013), 155
[215] Illarionov, 73.
[216] Fact-Finding Report, 215; Felgenhauer, 171.
[217] "Three Injured in Attack on Georgian Convoy in S. Ossetia," *Civil Georgia* (July 3, 1980), http://www-.civil.ge/eng/article.php?id=18674 (accessed 13 July 2015).
[218] "Two Killed in Overnight Shelling in S. Ossetia," *Civil Georgia* (July 4, 2008), http://www.civil.ge/eng-/article.php?id=18677&searchu (accessed August 1, 2008).
[219] "National Security Council Chief Testifies before War Commission," *Civil Georgia* (October 28, 2008) http://www.civil.ge/eng/article.php?id=19845 (accessed on June 6, 2008).

when their truck was hit with blasts from two improvised explosive devices.[220] Heavy mortar and sniper fire were exchanged between Georgian and Ossetian areas through the night of August 1, and continued the next two nights as well.[221] The OSCE put out a statement calling it the worst outbreak of violence since 2004, but declined to blame any party in particular.[222] Washington was likewise equivocal, calling on August 5 for direct talks between the parties and a cessation of violence. However, a spokesman specifically declined to suggest Russia was provoking the violence, even when pressed.[223]

Fruition: War, August 7-August 12

The August War itself was in essence the logical extension of Russia's proxy strategy. Its increasingly aggressive proxy war escalated into an actual war while both delaying Western reaction and successfully making Saakashvili take much of the blame. The outcome was a product of two critical questions. First, could Georgia seize Tskhinvali and choke off the Roki Tunnel (barring that, the Gupta Bridge, a choke point farther to the south) before additional Russian conventional forces could be brought into the battle? And second, would the international community successfully pressure Russia to avoid committing those forces whether or not the former occurred?

The first question was an operational issue. Speed was of the essence: to be successful, Georgian troops had to achieve a fait accompli before Russia's larger army

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[220] "MIA: Five Policemen injured in S. Ossetia Blast," *Civil Georgia* (August 1, 2008), http://www.civil.-ge/eng/article.php?id=18868 (accessed August 6, 2008).
[221] Fact-Finding Report, 208.
[222] OSCE Press Release, "OSCE Chairman-in-Office condemns Georgian-Ossetian conflict zone violence, reiterates invitation for dialogue" (August 2, 2008), http://www.osce.org/cio/49977 (accessed July 22, 2017).
[223] U.S. Department of State, "Daily Press Briefing," (August 5, 2008), https://2001-2009.state.gov/r/pa/prs/dpb/2008/aug/107739.htm (accessed April 8, 2020).

could mobilize. Against Russia's 27,000-40,000 men just across the border, the Georgian military had five brigades total. One (the 5th) was a training unit, and the top-line 1st Brigade was in Iraq, though some of its remaining artillery and mechanized elements saw combat. The primary fighting forces for the August War were the 2nd, 3rd, and 4th Infantry Brigades, as well as the 1st Artillery Brigade. The 2nd had recently returned from Iraq and was at its Senaki base near Abkhazia. The 3rd and 4th Brigades were training for Iraq at Kutaisi, in west-central Georgia.[224] In total, Georgia could field about 10,000-11,000 active-duty troops for the conflict, against a few thousand South Ossetian militiamen and less than a thousand Russian peacekeepers.[225] Militarily, it was possible.

But the second question cut to the quick of Russia's proxy strategy in South Ossetia. Given enough time, Russia's conventional forces would eventually be able to move south. They could only be stopped by Western military action – or more likely, a credible Western deterrent – that had to be led by the US. In Washington, there was far from unanimous agreement on the real-world implications – the military implications – of what Rice had negotiated at Bucharest.

In retrospect, NATO's expansion to the east, the very borders of the Soviet Union, were seen by some in the Bush Administration to have been unduly provocative. Robert Gates, the US Secretary of Defense, thought that the United States had vastly underestimated the humiliation Russians felt in the collapse of their world position. An entire legion of earnest American social scientists, diplomats, and businessmen had gone to Moscow to show the Russians how to build a modern state, and had trampled all over a nation's dignity. The rapid expansion of NATO after the addition of Poland, the Czech

[224] Asmus, 172.
[225] Fact-Finding Report, 214; Felgenhauer, 171.

Republic, and Hungary exacerbated this problem. The Bush Administration had been a strong supporter of NATO expansion in 2004, when seven new members entered the Alliance, including three from the former Soviet Union, and concluded a basically political troop-facilitation agreement with Romania and Bulgaria.[226]

The Bucharest statement on Ukraine and Georgia was emblematic of that humiliation, and reflected political motives, not military logic. Worse, these were political motives that had not taken Russian interests and reaction sufficiently into account. To remain viable the Alliance had to remain credible, and above all that meant preserving a credible military deterrent. Gates was deeply skeptical of both the European and the American publics' willingness to defend Georgia and Ukraine.[227] The question of the two for the US should be whether their accession met a military need and increased the Alliance's military power or whether it served a political need? Gates felt it was the latter.[228] Now the Russians had baited a trap and Saakashvili had taken the bait.

The White House's public comments illustrated this lag. At the outset, the majority of US pressure was on the Georgians rather than the Russians. Georgia's move was met with disproportionately more condemnation than the escalation before and in early August 7. It had the effect of essentially invalidating its US support, just as Rice promised in July. US Assistant Secretary of State for European and Eurasian Affairs Daniel Fried spoke with Tbilisi several times in the hours before the conflict and warned the government not to escalate.[229] Bush's initial statement on August 7 was restrained: he urged respect for Georgia's territorial integrity and sovereignty, but did not

[226] Gates, 157.
[227] Gates, 157.
[228] Gates, 157-158.
[229] Blank, 118.

specifically ascribe blame despite the months of rising violence.[230] The private message from his cabinet members to the Georgians was not one of support, but that Georgian actions had been "stupid" and "provocative."[231]

Almost certainly, the conventional Georgian military moved into South Ossetia before the Russian military. But the proxy conflict between Georgia and the South Ossetian militia had already grown intense, placing Georgia in a no-win situation. By August 7, Georgian forces and ethnically Georgian villages in South Ossetia were coming under fire nearly every night. They had no way of suppressing the immediate shelling without alienating its outside supporters, primarily the US. However self-servingly, Saakashvili testified later that the widespread shelling of civilians crossed a red line for Georgia.[232] Amidst the backdrop of escalating fighting on August 7, Georgia's State Minister for Reintegration Timur Iakobashvili spent the afternoon in Tskhinvali trying to unsuccessfully to arrange a truce. Saakashvili announced a unilateral ceasefire at 7 PM, but after a pause separatist forces resumed firing around 8:30 PM.[233] Three hours later, Tbilisi had had enough. Saakashvili called the Chief of the Joint Staff Zaza Gogava at 11:35 PM and gave him three missions: suppress separatist fire against Georgian security forces and villagers in South Ossetia, protect the civilian population, and lastly stop all types of military forces coming into Georgia from Russia.[234]

For twenty-four hours, it seemed possible. During the night of August 7 and early hours of August 8, Georgian forces moved into the South Ossetian capital of Tskhinvali

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[230] Toal, 23.
[231] Gates, 167-169.
[232] "Saakashvili Testifies Before War Commission," *Civil Georgia* (November 28, 2008), http://www.civil-.ge/eng/article.php?id=20043 (accessed August 5, 2015).
[233] Ibid.
[234] "Chief of Staff Testifies Before War Commission," *Civil Georgia* (October 29, 2008), http://www.civil.-ge/eng/article.php?id=19851 (accessed on June 6, 2015).

and the surrounding heights. The 4th Brigade surrounded the capital from the west, capturing territory including the town of Khetagurovo that had been the source of much of the shellfire. It was also tasked with holding the Dyzara road leading out of Tskhinvali, to prevent more Russian forces from entering the city.[235] The 3rd Brigade surrounded Tskhinvali from the east. A third force pushed through the middle of the city, occupied parts of it, and then secured the ethnically Georgian villages to the north. This third group was a loose amalgamation of special police units, interior ministry forces, and a few supplementary military elements.[236]

The entry into Tskhinvali proper was strange, since it did not advance any of Georgia's three war aims. According to Gogava, it was done for two reasons. First, the Georgian Interior Ministry posts surrounding the area were coming under fire from within the city. Second, the ethnic Georgian villages to the north of the capital needed to be evacuated, which necessitated the use of the main road through Tskhinvali.[237] Alexandre Lomaia, the secretary of the National Security Council, later agreed that the move into Tskinvali not due to the city's status as a military objective *per se*, but only to suppress the firing and move northward, closer to the village of Java and then the Roki tunnel.[238]

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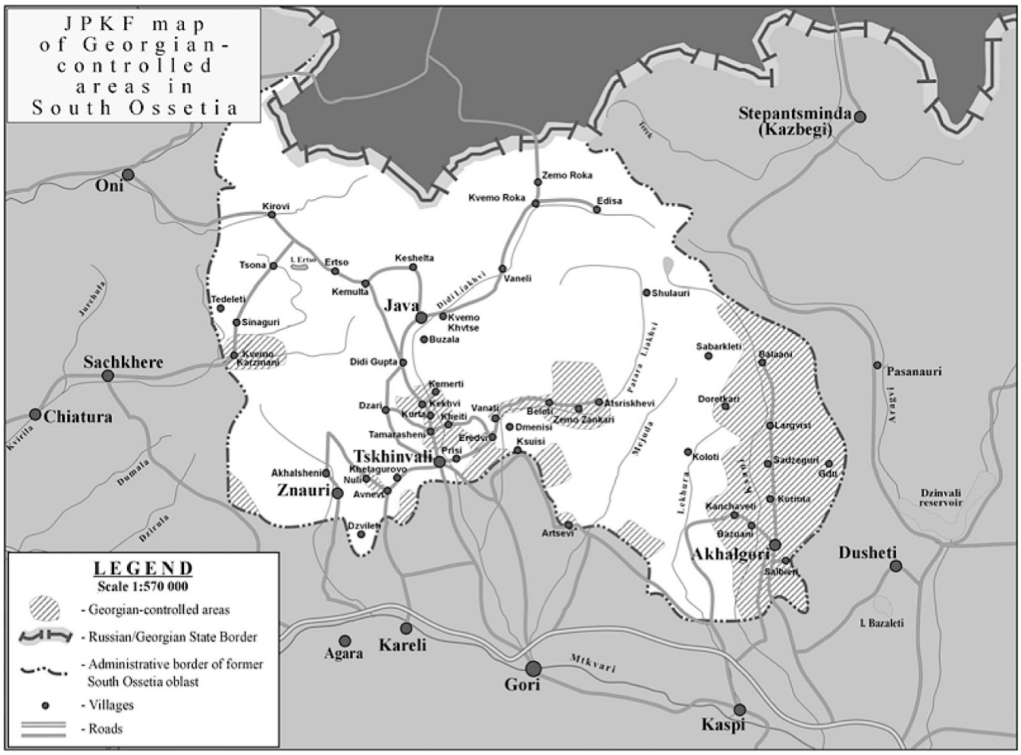
[235] Fact-Finding Report, 209.
[236] Asmus, 174.
[237] Ibid.
[238] "National Security Council Chief Testifies Before War Commission," *Civil Georgia* (October 28, 2008), http://www.civil.ge/eng/article.php?id=19845 (accessed on June 8, 2015).



Source: Joint Peacekeeping Force Map, International Crisis Group (2007)

An added complication was that fighting in Tskhinvali's populated urban center opened the issue of human rights violations. The strategic problem was that violations of humanitarian norms by Georgian conventional forces reflected immediately on Tbilisi, but South Ossetian violations – deniability, again – did not have the same effect on Russia. The Georgian military claimed it used no aircraft in strikes in or around Tskhinvali, but rather only on the Gupta Bridge which connected northern and southern South Ossetia, in an attempt to keep Russian forces from coming south. Similarly, Gogava said that only ground weapons and tanks were used in combat around Tskhinvali, and targeted the headquarters of the separatist militia forces.[239] Regardless, Russia justified its intervention in the rhetoric of NATO's intervention in Kosovo: it claimed

[239] "Chief of Staff Testifies Before War Commission," *Civil Georgia* (October 29, 2008), http://www.civil.-ge/eng/article.php?id=19851 (accessed on June 6, 2015).

massive humanitarian violations of the South Ossetian population, as a result of indiscriminate Georgian shelling and airstrikes of civilian areas. Some of these claims were indeed later verified by groups like Human Rights Watch.[240]

Operationally, Georgian forces did well during the night and morning of August 7-8. They managed to bring up artillery sufficiently far north of the city that they could attempt to destroy the Roki Tunnel, the key Russian military conduit from North Ossetia.[241] They had also significantly damaged with artillery fire a line of non-peacekeeping Russian forces advancing from the tunnel just after midnight on August 8.[242] On August 9, they would successfully attack a group from the 58th Army approaching the capital from the northwest. This engagement destroyed several vehicles and wounded the 58th Army commander, General Anatoly Khrulyov, who was travelling with the column.[243]

However, two problems stood out. First, there were more Ossetian and Russian troops in Tskhinvali than the Georgians had expected, with reinforcements arriving from the northwest during the day of August 8. This slowed their progress north. Elements of the 4th Brigade had to be added to the Georgian forces trying to clear the town.[244] Secondly, they had not advanced far enough to seize the Gupta Bridge, the second main bottleneck after Roki that was critical to contain the expected Russian reinforcements. They had damaged it with airstrikes and artillery fire, but that was easily fixed.[245]

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[240] Human Rights Watch (January 2009), 6.
[241] Asmus, 176.
[242] Felgenhauer, 169.
[243] "Russian General Wounded in Georgia's Rebel Region," *Reuters* (August 9, 2008), http://www.reuters.-com/article/2008/08/10/us-georgia-ossetia-general-idUSL949449820080810 (accessed June 28, 2015).
[244] Fact-Finding Report, 210.
[245] Ariel Cohen and Robert E. Hamilton, *The Russian Military and the Georgia War: Lessons and Consequences* (Carlisle: Strategic Studies Institute, 2011), 25.

These problems would start to become magnified as night fell and Georgian forces encountered more of Russia's conventional military. Georgia's mixed task force in the center gave up control of much of Tskhinvali and the northern areas and had to be reinforced by elements of the 4th Brigade to the west, which was itself reinforced by troops from the 2nd Brigade near the Abkhazia border.[246] However, Georgia's relatively few number of combat troops meant that this front was now undefended. Georgian forces made an effort to recapture the areas of Tskhinvali they had just abandoned, but were unsuccessful due to the increased fighting on the ground.[247]

Two elements contributed to Russia turning the tide on August 8-9. First, Russian attack aircraft were taking a toll on Georgian forces. Georgian forces around Tskhinvali were hit by a major airstrike from two regiments of the Russian Air Force, and on August 9 Russian aircraft hit the major Georgian base at Senaki and Tbilisi itself. Second, Georgian efforts to destroy the key bottleneck of the Gupta Bridge had failed, and Russian forces were expanding their southward offensive on the ground. On August 10, suffering heavily from air strikes, Georgian troops pulled out of Tskhinvali.[248]

[246] Fact-Finding Report, 210.
[247] Fact-Finding Report, 210.
[248] "Chief of Staff Testifies Before War Commission," *Civil Georgia* (October 29, 2008), http://www.civil.-ge/eng/article.php?id=19851 (accessed on June 6, 2015).

Source: International Crisis Group (2007)

With so many Georgian forces pulled to the east, Russia began to simultaneously increase the pressure on the Abkhazia front. During the night of August 9-10, Abkhaz elements began to make scouting incursions across the Inguri River into Georgian territory.[249] The remaining Georgian forces offered no resistance, but retreated east towards Gori. Late on August 10, Russian forces in Abkhazia crossed the river and began to occupy Georgian territory, including Georgia's main port of Poti and the major Georgian military base at Senaki, from which the 2nd Infantry Brigade had just left to reinforce the fighting around Tskhinvali.[250]

[249] Felgenhauer, 212.
[250] Fact-Finding Report, 212.

It is noteworthy that even as late as August 10th, with Russian troops pouring into Georgia, the United States was treading carefully about blaming Moscow, to say nothing of countering it. In a press briefing at the Olympics in Beijing, Deputy National Security Advisor Jim Jeffrey refused to blame Russia for the fighting, saying instead that the US focus was on getting both sides disengaged and working with international institutions to establish peace. The Bush Administration's spokeswoman Dana Perino likewise refused to call out Moscow, saying merely that they were asking "all parties commit to a cease-fire – the Russians and the Georgians and the South Ossetians, as well."[251]

In an attempt to stop the war, Tbilisi announced a unilateral ceasefire on August 10, a gesture that was not reciprocated by any other party. Georgian troops had pulled out of South Ossetia completely by the night of August 10-11 and then from Gori on August 11. The remaining Interior Ministry forces in the Kodori Gorge departed a day later. Georgian formations fell back to the town of Mtskheta, about 15 miles west of Tbilisi, where they prepared to make a last stand in the mountainous terrain.[252] It was only then, four vital days after the conflict started, before the US pointed the finger at Russia. Finally, President Bush released a statement on August 11 saying Moscow's actions had "substantially damaged Russia's standing in the world" and would "jeopardize Russia's relations with the United States and Europe." Russia had "invaded a sovereign neighbor state," he said, and "threatens a democratic government elected by its people. Such an action is unacceptable in the 21st century." Bush reiterated two days

[251] The White House, "Press Briefing by Press Secretary Dana Perino and Senior Director for East Asian Affairs Dennis Wilder and Deputy National Security Advisor Ambassador Jim Jeffrey," (August 10, 2008), https://georgewbush-whitehouse.archives.gov/news/releases/2008/08/20080810-4.html (accessed March 29, 2020).
[252] "Russian Army in Georgia Advances," *Al Jazeera English* (August 11, 2008), http://www.aljazeera.com/news/europe/2008/08/200881117173045375 6.html (accessed August 6, 2015).

later that the United States would "insist that the sovereignty and territorial integrity of Georgia be respected," though by that time it was far too late for action to balance the situation.[253]

This lower-profile US policy was matched by allowing French President Nicholas Sarkozy to take the lead in negotiating the ceasefire. Sarkozy had flown home early from the Beijing Olympics, as had Putin. Bush would stay for the remainder of the war. Ostensibly this deference to France was intended to prevent the war from turning into a Russian-US standoff. This would both reduce the risk of escalation and provide Russia the ability to compromise without appearing to back down to the US. But it was also helpful for Moscow, since Sarkozy also believed that Georgia bore much of the onus for starting the war and was not willing to commit French prestige in facing down the Russians.[254] The ceasefire document he drafted bore this out. It was ambiguous on key issues, to the detriment of Georgian interests. The document contained six points: point five mandated that Russian forces withdraw to their positions at the beginning of the war – that is, August 7 – but then added "prior to the establishment of international mechanisms the Russian peacekeeping forces will take additional security measures." This vagueness and tacit permission for Russia to codify a wider sphere of control potentially threatened Georgia's existence. At its core, the agreement conceded the right of Russian forces to be outside of South Ossetia and Abkhazia. Georgia was – is – also a narrow country connected by one main east-west road between the port, Poti, and the capital of Tbilisi. The borders of South Ossetia lay very close to this road at the town of

[253] "Bush Addresses Crisis in Georgia," *The Washington Post*, (August 13, 2008), http://www.washington-post.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2008/08/13/AR2008081301873.html (accessed August 8, 2015).
[254] Asmus, 190.

Gori. Permitting Russian troops to venture even slightly beyond the Ossetian borders allowed them to bifurcate and strangle the country at will. Another issue with the document was point six, which conceded the need for a discussion on "the future of South Ossetia and Abkhazia [on] ways to ensure their international stability." Which was just what the Georgians were trying to avoid, reopening the debate on the territorial integrity of Georgia, a concept that was (to their chagrin) not mentioned in the document.[255]

With its troops only hours away from the capital, Russia announced it had accepted the truce brokered by French President Nicolas Sarkozy and halted its troops on August 12.[256] It would take another two months for them to return to the borders of South Ossetia and Abkhazia, where they proceeded to expand their basing and presence. They would never return to the lines of August 7. Russia formally recognized both South Ossetia and Abkhazia as independent states on August 26, a move that was condemned by both the EU (in its strongest language to date on the crisis) and the US.[257] On August 31, Russian President Medvedev delivered a major speech at Sochi, formally laying out the five principles of this new Russian foreign policy. He promised that Russia would protect its citizens, wherever they may be; and formally declared great power prerogative – "privileged interests" – in certain regions, particularly the near abroad. "It is the border region," he said. "But not only."[258]

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[255] Asmus, 206.
[256] Andrew E. Kramer and Ellen Barry, "Russia, In Accordance with Georgians, Sets Withdrawal," *The New York Times* (August 12, 2008), http://www.nytimes.com/2008/08/13/world/europe/13georgia.html?n=Top%2FReference%2FTimes%20Topics%2FPeople%2FP%2FPutin%2C%20Vladimir%20V (accessed August 7, 2015).
[257] Asmus, 211, 213-214.
[258] Andrew E. Kramer, "Russia Claims Its Sphere of Influence in the World," *The New York Times* (August 31, 2008), https://www.nytimes.com/2008/09/01/world/europe/01russia.html (accessed March 20, 2020).

III. Conclusion and Analysis

On its face, the August War was a victory for Russian policy despite the close links between Moscow and its proxies. Georgia was crushed on the battlefield: its forces suffered an estimated 1400 casualties, compared to a quarter as many Russians and South Ossetians.[259] After the ceasefire, Russia increased its military footprint in the regions and thus the standing threat it could pose to Georgia's government. Russian defense minister Anatoly Serdyukov announced that the number of Russian forces in both breakaway provinces would be quadrupled and added pointedly that they would not be peacekeepers.[260] There was also an exodus of ethnic Georgians from the region after the conflict: most of the villages they left were subsequently occupied by Ossetians.[261] Russia had maintained total control over the South Ossetian government during the conflict, which was not strenuous since it had appointed much of that government. At no point were its own goals distinguishable from Russia's: they amounted to more Russian support, more Russian troops, and independence. When Medvedev recognized the regions on August 26, the Ossetians' aims were achieved.

Particularly in the short term, Russia also achieved most of its strategic objectives in Georgia, halting Saakashvili's effort to build a more independent foreign policy and Georgia's creeping integration with the West. Tbilisi's political support was shattered, particularly among Western Europeans, and without the Europeans there would be no NATO or EU membership. Sarkozy believed (reasonably enough) that Saakashvili had

[259] Fact-Finding Report, 223-224.
[260] James Sherr, "The Implications of the Russia-Georgia War for European Security," in *The Guns of August: Russia's War in Georgia,* ed. Svante E. Cornell and S. Frederick Starr (Armonk: M.E. Sharpe, 2009), 211-212.
[261] Asmus, 214.

started the war; he would later call the conflict a Georgian "mistake" and an "inappropriate action," which provoked a "disproportionate" reaction.[262] Even if the Russian response was disproportionate, Georgia still deserved blame. Most of the major European states agreed. Chancellor Angela Merkel disliked Georgian President Mikhail Saakashvili personally, which could not have contributed to Berlin's desire to get into a major confrontation with Russia on his behalf.[263] The German deputy foreign minister, Gernot Erler, called Tbilisi's actions a "violation of international law," and said he understood the Russian reaction.[264] Several other European states like Italy, the Netherlands, and Ireland were closer to Russia than Georgia, with Italian Prime Minister Silvio Berlusconi vocally opposing an anti-Russian position during the war.[265] The EU placed minimal sanctions on Russia and dumped them as soon as it was able.[266] His prestige damaged by the war, Saakashvili would eventually be replaced by a president who aimed at restoring ties with Russia and lowering the tension level.

The key question in this case was how Russia achieved these results in light of its direct and massive use of conventional force against a neighbor and its creeping escalation over the previous six months, if not two years. How, in other words, did Georgia get blamed for the war? Certainly, the American support for Saakashvili turned out to be was less than might have appeared to him in April 2008. Internally, the US

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[262] "Sarkozy on Russo-Georgia War," *Civil Georgia* (October 21, 2008), http://www.civil.ge/eng/article.php?id=19799 (accessed August 10, 2015).
[263] Thomas De Waal, "So Long, Mr. Saakashvili," *Foreign Affairs* (October 29, 2013), https://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/russia-fsu/2013-10-29/so-long-saakashvili (accessed August 9, 2015).
[264] "German minister says Georgia breaking international law," *The Local* (August 10, 2008), http://www.thelocal.de/20080810/13603 (August 11, 2015).
[265] James Nicols, "Russia-Georgia Conflict in August 2008: Context and Implications for US Interests," *Congressional Research Service*, RL34618 (May 3, 2009), 18.
[266] Edward Lucas, *The New Cold War: Putin's Russia and the Threat to the West* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014), xxvi.

government had very mixed feelings about its military commitment to Georgia and NATO's expansion to the east. President Bush was strongly in support of Georgian accession, but Rice and particularly Gates were leery. Gates's view that the move was a political one – that NATO had failed to take account of Russian interests and that Russia had reacted accordingly – did not bode well for Georgia's hope of rapid support during the conflict. And like their counterparts, senior US officials themselves viewed Saakashvili as a hothead, impulsive and proud. Only two months after Bucharest, and four since the Russian campaign really escalated after the Kosovo independence declaration, Rice was laying out with German leaders a roadmap to deescalate the situation. This roadmap bore much more in common with Tbilisi's preferred approach than South Ossetia, but its evenhandedness – combined with the milquetoast statements the State Department was issuing in response to military action and particularly the very blunt message Rice gave Saakashvili in July – suggested that a key strategic component was missing. Pressure on Russia. Or at least accountability for its intensifying proxy war.

This issue of the West's response to escalation was lent added significance by the difference in reaction of the West between Moscow's political actions in the regions and its military actions. It usually responded effectively towards Moscow's political moves, which had no deniability, and let the military actions pass without comment. This incongruity is at the core of the answer to the August War – and really, Russia's proxy strategy over more than two years. Russia was able to escalate the military pressure on Georgia without bearing the onus of aggression, which was precisely what a proxy strategy should achieve. Partially this was through obfuscating the intelligence and

information of potential balancers. US officials agreed that reporting on combat incidents on the ground was muddied in the first hours and days, and indeed the shelling on the night of August 7 was both significant and came from both sides.[267] This tactical uncertainty was a pattern of the conflict since combat incidents in the regions had increased, certainly since February 2008. The war was a short war: it was only about five days, and the mixed reporting at the beginning of the conflict helped degrade an international response by spreading the blame from the start of the war. There was little time as combat was progressing to get a more detailed picture of who had struck when in a way that might allow for the US and other Western states to shift their strategic assumptions and rally effective counterpressure in real time. This tactical uncertainty had been a hallmark of Russian operations not just in the leadup to the war but for years as the frozen conflict had become hotter.

Unfortunately for the Georgians, this tactical uncertainty was resolved by the presence of Georgian conventional forces in South Ossetia. A picture existed, however fraudulent, that the Georgians had launched a major military offensive into Tskhinvali and ipso facto bore responsibility for the conflict. Whatever the blurriness about shelling and Russian aircraft and the JCC troops and so forth, indisputably there were Georgian state forces in Tskhinvali and South Ossetia where the fighting was taking place. Functionally, this had the effect of abrogating much of Georgia's external support by assigning blame for the conflict to Tbilisi. And fair enough – Tbilisi had indeed launched the operation to retake the province. But in light of the escalating tactical situation, not to say the clear Russian political provocation early in the year, and Russian statements about

[267] Gates, 170; Rice, 687.

linking South Ossetia to Kosovo, the gradual escalation of 2008 should have been seen very differently, particularly given Bush's own expressed desires at Bucharest to bring Georgia into NATO. The gaping chasm between Russian political actions in 2006, military actions in 2007, the Bucharest statement, and then military and political escalation in the first half of 2008 pointed to a disconnect.

This was the second area where plausible deniability helped the Russians: escalation management. As it escalated the pressure, Georgia paid more and more of a political price and the Russians did not. As long as combat incidents were not clear-cut, or at least not obviously so, Georgian responses with state forces to proxy action would incur a disproportionate price from its alleged friends. The disconnect between the growing violence in early- to mid-2008 and the corresponding decline of Saakashvili's international support was the core of the outcome of this conflict. Moscow's entire proxy strategy focused on blurring the clear lines of peace and war, raising the threshold of conventional military aggression. That meant the pressure on Tbilisi could be gradually ratcheted up through proxies without crossing a clear line labeled WAR, which as an act of unprovoked aggression could bring about negative international consequences. Russia's communications strategy before and after the conflict focused heavily on Georgia's violation of that line. In an op-ed on August 26, Russian President Dmitry Medvedev blamed Georgian atrocities and aggression for the war and cited the legal example of the Western recognition of Kosovo.[268] Since the beginning of the war, Russia had been arguing that in fact it was Georgia that was the aggressor, that Saakashvili had

[268] Dmitry Medvedev, "Why I had to Recognize Georgia's breakaway regions," *Financial Times* (August 26, 2008), http://www.ft.com/intl/cms/s/0/9c7ad792-7395-11dd-8a66-0000779fd18c.html#axzz3csfBGsaq (accessed August 7, 2015).

recklessly provoked a conflict by offensive military action and thus somewhat deserved what he got. Sarkozy and others somewhat agreed.

This case is something of an outlier, since Russia's conventional presence in South Ossetia made its claim to deniability preposterous. Its forces very directly supported the Ossetians: in fact, conventional interventions were the hallmark of this Russian-proxy relationship. But Russia's deniability was aided by several factors. First, the major transfers of materiel to its proxies came during its more defensive periods, from 1991-1992 and then from mid-2004 to early 2006, when the regions were under threat. The defensive nature of these periods also helped reduce criticism of increases in Russian support, which seemed reactive – to the policies of Gamsakhurdia, to Shevardnadze, to Saakashvili. These helped justify Russian actions. When Russia wanted to project power offensively, it increased conventional operations and its force presence in the regions, like during 2000-2003 and 2006-2008. There was more pushback against these actions. In 2006 and again in 2008, the West began – occasionally – to condemn Russia's actions.

But it was a testament to how much Russia had raised the threshold of conflict that these protests were very few. Indeed, what sparked the American responses initially were Russian steps towards changing the regions' political status, which had basically zero plausible deniability, not just Russian actions on the ground. There was a striking difference between the two. The most immediate US responses came in November 2006, when South Ossetia voted for independence, and again in April 2008 when Putin created official contacts with the regions. This highlights that the US was willing to push back against Putin's use of his proxy on offense. However, it also highlights much Russia had succeeded in blurring Georgian sovereignty enough to project power and pressure

Georgia militarily while avoiding the consequences. It had, in other words, achieved significant military deniability.

Several additional factors improved this deniability. First, the diplomatic mechanism was hopelessly broken. The JCC was an invaluable tool for enabling Moscow to move additional troops and weapons into the region without suffering international censure and thus actually contributed to instability. Identifying which troops were peacekeepers and which were not was a difficult business; that difficulty contributed to the international inability to identify specific violations of Georgia's territorial sovereignty and initiate countermeasures. This aided Russia when it introduced heavier weapons to its peacekeeping formations in June 2008 and on the night of August 7, 2008, when reports emerged of troops moving through the Roki Tunnel. The JCC's codification of the separatists' local superiority essentially eliminated the main cost of direct support to proxies. By legitimizing the presence of Russian troops on Georgian soil, it allowed Russia's conventional forces to operate in Georgia without incurring the costs of conventional aggression. This mechanism also guaranteed the policy desires of the South Ossetians' government would always be represented, regardless of its military power or how much its legitimacy eroded because of Russian stage managing. The Georgians would always be outnumbered, and the weakest part (functionally) of the three.

Second, the scattered nature of Georgian villages in South Ossetia increased the conflict dyads between Ossetian militia and Georgian troops and required Georgian conventional forces to conduct offensive operations to reach their villages. The South Ossetian authorities faced the same dilemma, of course; they sought to support and

defend scattered villages of their own. But on balance, this dynamic helped them for several reasons. First, Georgia was nominally the landowning state. It was thus more bound to provide some sort of protection to its citizens (particularly its ethnic compatriots) if it wanted to make the case for its own sovereignty, which it did. Violence weakened its claim to governance and strengthened the competing claim: that of the Ossetians. This was counterinsurgency one-oh-one. Second, to provide that support, Georgian troops had to leave Georgia proper, enter South Ossetia, and proceed to outlying areas. This made Georgian forces look like the aggressors, because they were moving forward. Critically, though, Georgia needed to manage escalation. It would prevail in a situation of no escalation: that is, where the South Ossetia question was purely political. There, its rights were sacrosanct: South Ossetia was part of Georgia. End of discussion. It could also prevail in a situation of limited escalation. South Ossetia had a few thousand men under arms, but only a handful of these would be involved in combat incidents and in any case these were poorly equipped militia, no match for the Georgian armed forces. But it couldn't prevail in dynamic escalation, which is what the South Ossetians offered. That is, the authorities in Tskhinvali would always seek to raise the level of conflict because it would end with bringing in the Russians, and then the Georgians would lose. To avoid this, Georgia needed to illustrate to the international community – which might, might deter the Russians – that there was a very clear line between no conflict and conflict, and illustrate who was the aggressor. The offensive operations necessary to support outlying Georgian villages clouded that issue.

Third, Georgia's post-Rose Revolution government was still relatively new. The status quo was already in flux: because of his early and ongoing effort to change the

status of the provinces, as well as often half-baked military operations, Saakashvili was viewed as a hothead by Germany and other crucial states. That is, his identity was wrapped up in his effort to change the status quo. This is more of a perception issue, and is thus more difficult to measure, but his behavior and policies clearly masked some of the change in Russia's posture towards the regions, particularly in 2006 when it began to tolerate more risk. Crucially, Russia's adoption of an offensive posture and its increase in support to the regions was not wholly linked to Saakashvili. He was the same B-minus neighbor he had been since 2004. It was primarily linked to Kosovo and perceived Western double-dealing on sovereignty (and not totally exogenously Putin's hardening ideology). The newness of Saakashvili's regime thus probably contributed to Russia's deniability for its proxy support, since it could appear more defensive, and did indeed contribute to the collapse in Georgia's Western European support as the war was fought. Stability is cumulative.

Fourth, the Chechen war and Georgia's neglect of its border region provided Moscow additional justification to both support friendly proxies on the other side of the Caucasus and to conduct conventional operations across Georgia's borders. Particularly as radical Islamic groups began to be more prominent in the Chechen resistance and their acts of terrorism became more gruesome, Russia's case for cross-border operations became stronger. This trend was given added weight by the terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001 in the United States, which fundamentally reordered the US perception of interests in the Caucasus, its focus on Islamic terrorism, and its tolerance of other countries – like Russia – entertaining high degrees of risk in killing terrorists themselves. For several years, the US acquiesced (if not openly encouraged) in Russia's

aggressive pursuit of Islamist terrorists in Chechnya, terrorists that looked not too dissimilar from al-Qaeda. Indeed, this lowered tolerance for risk was one of the key reasons that led it into Iraq. The additional international latitude provided by the US War on Terror aided the deniability of Russia's cross border military operations into Georgia, and gave Moscow a greater cushion of international support with which to work. Ironically enough, it was Georgia's heroic participation in the Iraq War, itself a product of this lowered risk tolerance for Islamic extremism, that brought the United States more fully into alignment with Georgian goals and more into collision with Russian ones.

All of these elements contributed to weakening Georgian sovereignty and thus the penalties for Russian interstate aggression. And yet even the strategic outcome was more mixed than appeared at first glance. Ten days after the war ended, Poland signed a long-stalled agreement to base US missile defenses on its territory. Within a month, Georgia hosted visits by Vice President Dick Cheney, Senate Foreign Relations Committee Chairman Joe Biden, and Secretary Rice. Biden brought with him a $1 billion aid bill for Tbilisi that he was preparing to shepherd through Congress. The aid package was passed by September, a remarkable achievement in an election year that reflected an emerging bipartisan consensus on Georgia. The billion-plus aid package included $50 million for security assistance. Cheney brought confirmation of the hardening US position on Russia, calling Moscow's actions an "invasion" and an "illegitimate" attempt to change its borders that was "universally condemned by the free world." "Georgia will be in our alliance," he promised.[269] The United States and Georgia signed a strategic framework

[269] Luke Harding and Julian Borger, "Cheney attacks 'illegitimate' Russian invasion on way to Georgia," *The Guardian* (September 4, 2008), https://www.theguardian.com/world/2008/sep/04/georgia.russia (accessed April 9, 2020).

agreement on January 9, 2009, committing the US to support Tbilisi's territorial integrity and security, to cooperate on defense, and to integrate Georgia into transatlantic alliances.

It was fortuitous for Moscow that the growing balancing it faced was cut short by a US election: and not just any election, but a presidential election that reflected deep dissatisfaction with the Bush Administration's foreign policy. This domestic political element was a key but unique mitigating factor in the American response in this case. The US political mood was exacerbated by the ongoing global financial crisis, but heavily influenced by the perceived catastrophic failure of the war in Iraq. Five months later, the new administration of Barack Obama came to power promising a "reset" in relations with Russia, which tacitly translated at the very least into halting Western institutions' eastward expansion and at most according it a sphere of influence in the former Soviet space. This policy was shaped by a number of factors, such as the Bush Administration's perceived belligerence; disillusionment with Bush-era muscular democracy promotion; needless antagonizing of Russia through expanding NATO into ex-Soviet space; and a different focus on institutions and multilateral priorities like arms control.

But even when rolling out the signature policies of the new administration there was recognition of the new threat. In a speech to the Munich Security Conference in February 2009 where he called for a "reset" in relations with Russia, Vice President Biden firmly rejected Medvedev's claims to a sphere of influence in the near abroad and the independence of the regions.[270] The first meeting of Bush's strategic partnership

[270] The White House, "Remarks by Vice President Biden at 45th Munich Conference on Security Policy," (February 7, 2009), https://obamawhitehouse.archives.gov/the-press-office/remarks-vice-president-biden-45th-munich-conference-security-policy (accessed April 6, 2020).

group came five months later under the nominally disinterested Obama Administration.[271] The first disbursement of security aid followed. The Obama Administration's record on Russia remained ineffectual in many ways, but even so the institutional rails were being laid for a bilateral relationship that was qualitatively different from ten years earlier.

And the war likely accelerated a balancing trend, long in remission, among its neighbors. During the conflict, Saakashvili had consulted publicly with several other leaders of Eastern European nations including Estonia and Poland. South Ossetia and Abkhazia also remained stubbornly unrecognized by all but a handful of states. This conjoining trend was accelerated by Russia's war in Ukraine six years later, and even extended to some of the Nordic countries. Georgia was the first Russian extraterritorial operation since the end of the Cold War, and thus there was some natural lag in the West's response. In Ukraine, it would act more quickly.

[271] U.S. Department of State, "United States-Georgia Charter on Strategic Partnership," (January 9, 2009), https://www.state.gov/united-states-georgia-charter-on-strategic-partnership/ (accessed April 8, 2020).

CHAPTER THREE: RUSSIA AND UKRAINE, 2013-2016

Russia's Ukraine war in 2014 was the second shock to Europe's interstate order since the end of the Cold War, but it was not quite such a surprise as the first. Like in Georgia, Moscow used barely-disguised proxy forces and brute military strength to invade a state shifting its foreign policy orientation [illegible]at force was thinly veiled in eastern Ukraine. In Crimea, it was not veiled at all.

From the beginning, there was a disparity of national interest in the conflict among the competing states. Ukraine was not a traditionally Western interest. For the entirety of its modern history, the lands along the Dnieper River had been a part of one Russian empire or another. They were seized by Germany after its First World War victory over Russia in 1917, and quickly recaptured when Germany withdrew under the Treaty of Versailles. [illegible]aine's people were ruined by Stalin and starved into the [illegible]odomor, a national tragedy that became the country's modern founding myth. Ukraine emerged from the Soviet period still aligned with Russia, an autocratic member of a CIS which had many such autocrats. Its first whiff of true independence came in December 2004, during the Orange Revolution, when President Viktor Yanukovych tried to fix one too many elections and was deposed by two months of civil protests. After the reformers fell out amongst themselves, Yanukovych was reelected in 2009 and held office until civil protests broke out in 2013.

This chapter will examine Russia's use of proxy forces in Ukraine from the beginning of demonstrations in Kiev's Maidan Square on November 21, 2013 to the dissipation of the conflict in 2016. Though it covers all the high-intensity periods of the war, this chapter is focused on the fighting in Donbas and not

Russia's takeover of Crimea. It describes the background context to the conflict, Russia's proxy doctrine, and Russia's relationship with the separatists. It then analyzes key moments when the relationship changed and how that impacted the separatists' strategic effectiveness. Unlike in Georgia, Russia never overtly deployed conventional forces, nor were such forces used at a consistent operating tempo throughout the eastern crisis. Instead, they intervened operationally at critical points to avert defeat or seize key objectives, like at Ilovaisk in 2014 or Debaltseve in 2015. These moments of changing tactics will be examined to identify changes in the balancing that Russia's proxy war incited. This chapter will also examine periods of slack in Western balancing such as in April 2014. It will also describe additional factors that affected Russian effectiveness in projecting power. These include the Minsk process, particularly the second Minsk agreement, and the ethnic heterogeneity around the line of control. Overall, Russia achieved significant deniability and strategic success in the first phase of the conflict but less of both in the second.

I. Origin

The previous chapter examined the evolution of Russia's ideological approach to the West, its near abroad, and the issue of ethnic separatism. By 2013, this basic ideological *id* had solidified into something that would be called Putinism. Putin's was a statist, great-power political system that relied heavily on active and former officials of the security services to dominate Kremlin politics and Russia's economy. Russia had successfully intervened in Georgia in 2008,

preventing that country from joining NATO in the foreseeable future. To do so without decisive Western interference, it utilized the fuzzy question of Russianness and ethnic identity – what it meant to be a Russian – to blur the lines of Georgian sovereignty and transform its military aggression into something that was treated less than interstate war. The ethnic issue also affected the solidity of Russia's border with Ukraine. Ukraine's territory was also heterogeneous: it included a chunk of historically Polish lands to the west and Romanian and Czechoslovak territory from the southwest, all land-booty from World War II. But in 2014 nearly 20 percent of Ukrainian citizens were ethnic Russians, who constituted a majority in Crimea and significant pluralities in the east and southeast. By the time of the conflict, they made up nearly 40 percent of the population in the Donestsk and Luhansk oblasts.[272] And ideologically Ukraine was integral to the Russian nationalists' views of their heritage; Russia drew its very name and statehood from the Kievan Rus, a Viking tribe that settled in Ukraine.

Crimea was particularly critical. "It is strange," the journalist Vitaly Tretyakov noted, that "Russia includes Chechnya but not Crimea."[273] It had been the home of the Russian Black Sea fleet since 1783, and had only been given to the Soviet Republic of Ukraine in 1954 by administrative fiat. After the fall of the Soviet Union, Russia had leased the base for twenty-five years. This arrangement

[272] Elena Maltseva, "Lost and forgotten: The conflict through the eyes of the Donbass people," The Return of the Cold War: Ukraine, The West, and Russia," ed. J.L. Black and Michael Johns (New York: Routledge, 2016), 147.
[273] Dmitri Trenin, The End of Eurasia: Russia on the Border Between Geopolitics and Globalization (Washington, DC: Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, 2002), 179.

survived an initial period of tension in the newly independent state and Russian-Ukrainian relations improved under the country's second post-Communist president Leonid Kuchma. Kuchma's reign, though autocratic and beset by corruption, was marked by engagement with both Russia and the West. Ukraine allowed Soviet nuclear weapons to be removed from its soil in exchange for a 1994 guarantee of its territorial integrity. It became the first nation from the Commonwealth of Independent States to join NATO's Partnership for Peace program in 1994, and Ukrainian soldiers served as peacekeepers in Bosnia Herzegovina in 1996.[274] None of this prevented Russia and Ukraine from signing the Russia-Ukraine Friendship Treaty in 1997, putting to bed disputes over the Black Sea Fleet and ethnically Russian s.[275]

However, the hardening Russian security doctrine that marked Russian President Boris Yeltsin's later years maintained that if Ukraine appeared likely to join NATO, Russia should take advantage of Ukraine's ethnic heterogeneity and support separatism in Crimea and the east.[276] Several key ideological and strategic advisors of Putin would provide the intellectual framework for intervention, including an article by Putin aide Vladislav Surkov. In an apocryphal short story, Surkov described a new form of warfare – "non-linear war" – that would pull apart the trappings of the state and set local communities

[274] Toal, 205.
[275] Michael Specter, "Setting Past Aside, Russia and Ukraine Sign Friendship Treaty," *The New York Times* (June 1, 1997), http://www.nytimes.com/1997/06/01/world/setting-past-aside-russia-and-ukraine-sign-friendship-treaty.html (accessed October 30, 2017).
[276] Gerard Toal, *Near Abroad: Putin, the West, and the Contest over Ukraine and the Caucasus* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2017), 208.

against each other.[277] This was remarkably similar to a Kremlin memo by Konstantin Malofeev, a Putin advisor and oligarch, which was leaked at the height of the crisis. This memo argued that in the face of threats to Ukraine's strategic orientation, Russia should use the "centrifugal aspirations of various regions of the country with the purpose, in one form or another, of initiating the annexation of its eastern regions to  sia."[278] Malofeev was eventually sanctioned by the EU for financing separatism in Ukraine.

Malofeev's memo was one intellectual piece of a strategy that would come to be known as hybrid war. Hybrid war posited a full spectrum of operations and agents all working towards a similar political goal, with the intent of attacking an enemy's conventional military power, psychological power, and leadership capabilities simultaneously.[279] It would come to define Russia's joint deployment of nonstate and conventional forces to subvert pieces or the whole of an enemy country, often while Russia denied involvement. Among other unconventional elements it stressed information warfare, flooding the enemy airwaves with

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[277] "Russia has, in effect, already invaded eastern Ukraine. The question is how the West will respond," *The Economist* (July 3, 2014), http://www.economist.com/news/europe/21606290-russia-has-effect-already-invaded-eastern-ukraine-question-how-west-will (accessed October 24, 2017).

[278] "Novaya Gazeta's 'Kremlin Papers' article: Full text in English," *UNIAN Information Agency* (February 25, 2015), https://www.unian.info/politics/1048525-novaya-gazetas-kremlin-papers-article-full-text-in-english.html (accessed November 4, 2017); Matthew Dalton, "EU Places Sanctions on Russian Oligarchs," *The Wall Street Journal* (July 3, 2014), https://www.wsj.com/articles/eu-places-sanctions-on-russian-oligarchs-1406749975 (accessed November 7, 2017).

[279] Key definitional articles on hybrid war theory include John McCuen, "Hybrid Wars," *Military Review* (March/April 2008), 108-109, https://www.armyupress.army.mil/Portals/7/military-review/Archives/English/MilitaryReview_20080430_art017.pdf (accessed October 10, 2020); Frank Hoffman, "Hybrid Warfare and Challenges," *Joint Forces Quarterly* 52 (1st quarter 2009): 30-32; William Nemeth, "Future War and Chechnya: A Case for Hybrid Warfare," (master's thesis: Naval Postgraduate School, 2002), 71-76, https://calhoun.nps.edu/bitstream/handle/10945/5865/02Jun_Nemeth.pdf?sequence=1&isAllowed=y (accessed October 14, 2020); and Peter Mansoor, "Hybrid Warfare in History," in Williamson Murray and Peter Mansoor, eds., *Hybrid Warfare: Fighting Complex Opponents from the Ancient World to the Present* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2012), 2, from where this definition comes.

disinformation to inhibit central authority and sway the population. Information outlets would generate and spread narratives of ethnic or social grievance, both to rally the local population and muddy the moral and legal issues for outside powers. Controlling key command and control nodes was also critical, to remove central authority and replace it with Russia's own. Substate military forces could perform this function if they were militarily capable. In eastern Ukraine, they generally would be. If not, as in Crimea, Russian military forces could perform this role. Above all, the goal was to erode the adversary's will to fight, to disrupt and replace their control capabilities in the contested area, to paralyze the enemy's external support, to manage escalation on the ground, and to avoid consequences to the instigator.

Of course, it helped enormously when structural factors – the local terrain, a heterogenous population, a weak state – were in place already. This limited the transferability of the Russian doctrine of full-spectrum war elsewhere. Hezbollah, which will be reviewed in the next case, had a long history of effective guerilla operations but did not fundamentally adopt Russian innovations in proxy war. Part of this was due to the fact that particular features like the human terrain and a changing regime were not present on the Israeli border the same way they were in Ukraine. Ironically, for a conflict that often has revolved around the legitimacy of Israel, the Lebanon-Israeli border is from a military point of view entirely clear which limits the usefulness of techniques like the ones Russia used in Ukraine. There was a definite shift in Hezbollah operations, for example, when Israel withdrew from Lebanese territory. Hezbollah attacks become more complex and

the group began to acquire more weapons like long-range missiles. In point of fact the guerilla war Hezbollah waged against Israel from 2000 onwards (with the exception of the July War, which was obviously fought in Lebanon) bore very little resemblance to proxy war or hybrid war and much more resemblance to conventional military combat. The Hezbollah television station al-Manar, for example, had rather limited appeal to the Jewish population that lives along the Israeli side of the border.

Region-specific elements also helped spur the evolution of Russia's proxy doctrine during the years between the Georgian war and the Ukrainian one. In Georgia this style of war had been arrived at almost inductively. After all, the proxy forces in South Ossetia and Abkhazia had been separate for nearly two decades by the time of the conflict. They had extensive Russian coordination and involvement, particularly in South Ossetia. Russian conventional forces had been in both regions nearly as long as peacekeepers. Russia had built-in levers when it wanted to tweak the West after Kosovo's independence, and done of these elements had to be created from scratch. In Ukraine they did. This limited the initial combat effectiveness of the separatists, and increased the incentive – in the early days of Crimea – to use barely-disguised Russian military personnel rather than semi-organic separatist military units.

This case is not focused on the elements of Russian proxy war as employed against Ukraine. Rather it is interested in one facet of its battlefield effect: that of plausible deniability, which became more important for Russia between the Georgian case and the Ukrainian case. Deniability was a key element

of the new kind of war for Russian military thinkers.[280] Hybrid war, at its core, was a type of proxy war that traded military power for plausible deniability and embodied a close-control style of proxy relationship. The focus on full-spectrum operations that prioritized the politically-focused elements of war – but definitely did include direct combat elements – achieved a certain level of plausible deniability for Russia. In Ukraine it included less conventional involvement than in in the Georgian case, however, and indeed the relationships between proxy and state and state and force were more deniable. The Georgian case succeeded despite a striking lack of deniability partially because of many of the special territorial elements described previously. Six years later these were arguably fewer, and Russia's use of force needed correspondingly to be less direct and more deniable to achieve its strategic results.

This suggests another shift in Russian doctrine since the August War. Was Russian doctrine becoming more offensive? The seminal White Paper issued by Russia's defense ministry in 2003 had been notable for its stress on defending Russia from enemies on all sides, foreign and domestic.[281] Until then, the rebellions of internal republics and civil unrest had been post-Soviet Russia's greatest security concerns. Islamic radicalism and two brutal wars in Chechnya were a harbinger of the threat that other secession-minded member republics like Tatarstan could pose to the Russian state. These wars bore more than a whiff of

[280] Valery Gerasimov, "The Value of Science in Prediction," *Military-Industrial Kurier* (February 27, 2013), in Mark Galeotti, In Moscow's Shadows: Analysis and Assessment of Russian Crime and Security, https://inmoscowsshadows.wordpress.com/2014/07/06/the-gerasimov-doctrine-and-russian-non-linear-war/, (accessed October 3, 2020).
[281] Matthew Bouldin, "The Ivanov Doctrine and Military Reform: Reasserting Stability in Russia," *The Journal of Slavic Military Studies* (August 10, 2010), 619-641.

the Afghanistan debacle, which was widely credited as being an important factor in the Union's collapse. The last chapter described how Ukraine's Orange revolution, which brought the openly pro-Western Viktor Yushchenko to power in 2004, was a turning point in Putin's attitude towards the West.[282] As Ukraine and Georgia tried to define themselves into the Western orbit and out of the Russian one through groups like the Community of Democratic Choice, Russian statements grew increasingly belligerent. Over the next three years Russian policy became more assertive in the near abroad. During the NATO summit in Bucharest in 2008, Putin apocryphally explained to President George W. Bush that Ukraine was an amalgamation of territories, not a real state.[283] He also threatened Ukraine with Russia's missile arsenal and with dismemberment if it tried to join NATO.[284]

A decade after the White Paper, many saw Russia as looking abroad for fights. In 2013, Russia's Chief of the General Staff General Valery Gerasimov gave a speech that formalized the elements of hybrid war into what he called "new generation warfare:" the whole of capabilities approach, blurring the line between peace and war, the focus on information as a decisive battleground. Above all this focused on the importance, even decisiveness, of the facets of power short of direct combat, and the secondary importance of regular forces.

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[282] Steven Myers, *The New Tsar: The Rise and Reign of Vladimir Putin* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2015), 277.
[283] Angela Stent, "Putin's Ukrainian endgame and why the West may have a hard time stopping him," *CNN* http://www.cnn.com/2014/03/03/opinion/stent-putin-ukraine-russia-endgame/index.html (accessed September 25, 2017).
[284] Rosalind Ryan, "Join NATO and we'll target missiles at Kiev, Putin Warns Ukraine," *The Guardian* (February 12, 2008), https://www.theguardian.com/world/2008/feb/12/russia.ukraine (accessed November 2, 2017).

Gerasimov's speech stressed the importance of deniability when military means had to be used. This was aimed not at the rebellious regions of Russia but at the West, particularly the West that had celebrated the Color Revolutions in Georgia in 2003 and Ukraine in 2004. The Arab Spring uprisings that began in 2009 were seen by many in Russia's military apparatus as part of the same trend, the political result of subversive Western techniques of non-military power to overthrow governments.[285] Gerasimov had specifically predicated his remarks in this strategic battlespace:

> "The experience of military conflicts — including those connected with the so-called coloured revolutions in north Africa and the Middle East — confirm that a perfectly thriving state can, in a matter of months and even days, be transformed into an arena of fierce armed conflict, become a victim of foreign intervention, and sink into a web of chaos, humanitarian catastrophe, and civil war."[286]

Though this reflected what in Gerasimov's view the West had done to unsuspecting, Russian-friendly regimes like Libya, it also seemed to urge Russia to be more forward-leaning even in times of not-war.[287] "War in general," said Gerasimov in his speech, quoting an earlier Soviet theoretician, "is not declared. It simply begins…"[288]

After Ukrainian President Yanukovych regained the presidency from the Orange leaders in 2009, the danger of Ukraine drifting away appeared to have passed. Yanukovych was corrupt and from the ethnically Russian east of

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[285] Mark Galeotti, "The Gerasimov Doctrine and Russian Non-Linear War," In Moscow's Shadows: Analysis and Assessment of Russian Crime and Security, https://inmoscowsshadows.wordpress.com/2014/07/06/the-gerasimov-doctrine-and-russian-non-linear-war/, (accessed October 5, 2020).
[286] Gerasimov.
[287] Andras Racz, *Russia's Hybrid War in Ukraine: Breaking the Enemy's Ability to Resist* (Helsinki: Finnish Institute of International Affairs, 2015), 49, https://stratcomcoe.org/andras-racz-russias-hybrid-war-ukraine-breaking-enemys-ability-resist (accessed October 9, 2020).
[288] Gerasimov.

Ukraine, but he was not particularly ideological. He sought to improve ties with both Russia and the EU, playing a delicate balancing act by taking just as much from the West as the Russians would allow.[289] Then, in November 2013, he rejected an association agreement with the European Union. He had been negotiating with the Europeans for over a year, and though his electoral base lay in the more euroskeptic east all indications were that he would sign it. He did not.

As word of the rejection leaked out on November 21, 2013, over two thousand demonstrators gathered in the Maidan in central Kiev. By November 24, their numbers had grown to 200,000. Police tried to control the crowds with tear gas and beatings, and some of the protestors retaliated. On November 30, at 4:00 AM, the security forces made a concerted effort to clear the square and failed. The next day the demonstrators attempted to occupy Kiev's city hall. Yanukovych hastily traveled to Sochi to meet with Putin on December 6. Their discussion focused on a new "strategic partnership" framework, and some rapid economic measures to help Ukraine's economy. Yanukovych's Prime Minister Mykola Azarov promised a "major agreement" coming out of Moscow in the future.[290] On December 17, Yanukovych and Putin signed a new deal in Moscow, the Ukrainian-Russian joint action plan. In place of the rejected

[289] "Profile: Ukraine's ousted President Viktor Yanukovych," *BBC* (February 28, 2014), http://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-25182830 (accessed November 4, 2017).
[290] Richard Balmforth and Pavel Polityuk, "Defying Protestors, Yanukovych meets Putin on Pact," *Reuters* (December 3, 2013), http://www.reuters.com/article/us-ukraine-protests-idUSBRE9B41CD20131206 (accessed July 24, 2015); Office of the President of Russia, "Meeting with President of Ukraine Viktor Yanukovych," (December 13, 2013), http://en.kremlin.ru/events/president/news/19799 (accessed July 24, 2015).

European association agreement, Putin offered economic goodies. He agreed to buy $15 billion of Ukrainian bonds and cut gas prices for Ukraine by a third.[291]

In late January, however, he stalled. At a meeting in Brussels, Putin informed the Ukrainians that because of resistance from his cabinet Russia's promised economic aid would not come. Russia twisted the knife further by having its border guards increase their searches of Ukrainian goods, increasing transit time and lowering trade revenue. Though the Russian government cited Ukraine's failure to pay back its $2.7 billion gas debt, almost certainly its intention was to increase economic pressure on the regime in Kiev.[292] Putin wanted Yanukovych to crack down hard on the protestors, and he had not.[293] If Putin's intention was to play hardball with the Ukrainians, it was a fatal miscalculation. Yanukovych's prime minister resigned on January 28 in an apparent attempt to disperse the demonstrations. Two weeks later, Yanukovych issued a blanket amnesty and released all of the protestors who had been detained by the police. The protestors ended their occupation of city hall, and the two sides met to negotiate an end to the standoff on February 16.

Those talks blew apart two days later. Shortly after Russia released $2 billion of the $15 billion in aid it had been holding back as incentive for Ukraine to crack down, Yanukovych's security forces issued an ultimatum for Maidan to be cleared by 6 PM. When the protesters refused, riot police attempted – again

[291] Marvin Kalb, "Imperial Gamble: Putin, Ukraine, and the New Cold War," (Washington, DC: Brookings Institution Press, 2015), 143.
[292] Kalb, 150.
[293] Andrew Kramer, "Russia Defers Aid to Ukraine, and Unrest Persists," *The New York Times* (January 29, 2014), http://www.nytimes.com/2014/01/30/world/europe/ukraine-protests.html?_r=0 (accessed July 26, 2016).

unsuccessfully – to clear them by force. The crowd and police exchanged gunshots in an escalating firefight that killed 24 people, including seven police officers.[294] There was a pause, as the government, shocked by the violence, looked like it might compromise. Opposition members of the Ukrainian parliament, joined by some of Yanukovych's own party, passed a resolution calling on Interior Ministry troops to stand down and normal police functions to resume. But they did not. Two days after the February 18 shootings, police opened fire on large bodies of demonstrators, some of whom were firing back, killing 88 people and wounding hundreds of others.[295] As darkness fell on February 21, Yanukovych had had enough. Despite joint mediation efforts by the US, Russians, and major European states to reach an agreement on forming a coalition government and holding early presidential elections, he fled Kiev in the night, first to his political base in eastern Ukraine and then on to Russia.[296] On February 23, with the capital under control of the demonstrators and former President Yulia Tymoshenko released from prison, her ally Oleksandr Turchynov was appointed acting President of Ukraine until new elections could be held.

III. The Conflict

Rebellion, March 2014 to mid-May 2014

[294] Pavel Polityuk and Marcin Goettig," Ukrainian police charge protestors after nation's bloodiest day," *Reuters* (February 16, 2014), http://www.reuters.com/article/us-ukraine-idUSBREA1G0OU20140218 (accessed July 26, 2016).
[295] Andrew Kramer and Andrew Higgins, "Ukraine's Forces Escalate Attacks Against Protestors," *The New York Times* (February 20, 2014), http://www.nytimes.com/2014/02/21/world/europe/ukraine.html?_r=0 (accessed July 27, 2016).
[296] Andrew Higgins and Andrew Kramer, "Archrival is Freed as Ukraine Leader Flees," *The New York Times* (February 22, 2014), http://www.nytimes.com/2014/02/23/world/europe/ukraine.html (accessed July 27, 2016).

Maidan – and the Orange Revolution before it – may have been feel-good stories for the West, but they were deeply unsettling to Russia. Moscow had vital interests in Ukraine, the most pressing of which was retaining the leased naval base at Sevastopol in the Crimean Peninsula. The renewal of the lease had been Russia's top priority after Yanukovych regained the  idency in 2010. Second, and almost as important, Moscow wanted to keep Ukraine from drifting into Western organizations, the EU as much as NATO. This had been the context of the fight over the EU association agreement. Post-Soviet Ukraine could be a key buffer state between Russia and the West, a role which had grown more critical since Putin's second term and his increasingly zero-sum East-West ideology. Putin was also trying to launch a Russia-centric economic zone that would rival the European Union: a customs union with at least Belarus and – he had hoped – Ukraine.[297] A gain for Western institutions was a blow to the sustainability of their rivals. The success of the Maidan revolution would also set a bad example for Russia's other allies that might be ruled by less-than-free governments, places like Belarus and Kazakhstan.

To these ends, Moscow used proxy forces to blur Ukrainian sovereignty enough to allow it to pressure Kiev with military force without sparking decisive international pushback. However, some separatists and Russian ideologues like Surkov and Malofeev held a broader aim: to create the state of Novorussiya. Novorussiya would be an area comprised of not just the Donbas and Crimea but Odessa, Kharkov, and other areas beyond Donbas where ethnic Russians were a

[297] Roy Allison, "Russia's 'deniable' intervention in Ukraine: how and why Russia broke the rules," International Affairs, 90, no. 6 (November 2014), 1256.

significant [redacted]ority. For them, this entity could be annexed by the Russian Federation and become a member republic.[298] However, this goal would eventually diverge with – and then impede – Russia's basic desire to maintain the pre-crisis status quo. After the first set of uprisings failed to seize enough territory in the east to achieve such a state and the line of control solidified, every additional square foot [redacted]nd would have to be taken by offensive conventional military operations and incite significant balancing. That balancing would pull Ukraine into the same Western military camp the entire proxy war had sought to avoid.

Source: Central Intelligence Agency World Factbook, https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/attachments/maps/UP-map.gif (accessed June 4, 2020).

For indeed the Maidan movement which had taken control of liberal, Catholic, pro-Western Kiev had spread elsewhere. There were Maidan

[298] Toal, 264.

demonstrations outside the capital and in the east, in places like Kharkiv, the city to which Yanukovych allegedly fled. But in Crimea a different dynamic took hold. Three days after the new government in Kiev took power, pro-Russian demonstrators appeared in the Crimean capital city of Simferopol. They called for assistance, and Moscow answered. On February 28, the first of Russia's "little green men" appeared. Aided by local agents, these forces quickly took control of the Perekop Isthmus, the roughly four-mile stretch of land that connects Ukraine to Crimea. They also occupied Crimea's airports, naval facilities, and Ukrainian television and radio stations, effectively imposing a total blackout. Among the seized institutions was Crimea's Supreme Council, which promptly named the ethnic Russian Sergey Aksyonov Prime Minister of Crimea and called for a referendum on seceding from Ukraine and joining Russia. A day later, the Russian parliament initiated legislation to expedite the admittance of Ukrainian territory to the Russian Federation, on the basis of Kiev's alleged ill treatment of Russian minorities.

There was little violence, despite the Ukrainian government's 190 military facilities in Crimea and 20,000 troops. Most soldiers remained in place or surrendered. The only documented casualties occurred during the storming of a reconnaissance facility in Simferopol, when a Ukrainian soldier and a rebel fighter were killed. Russia's official media claimed that these unknown forces were local militia, self-defense groups acting to protect themselves.[299] They were

[299] International Crisis Group, "Crisis Watch – Ukraine," (February 14, 2014) https://www.crisisgroup.org/crisiswatch/database?location%5B%5D=73&date_range=custom&from_month=01&from_year=2014&to_month=04&to_year=2014 (accessed August 1, 2016).

instead mostly a rushed mishmash of Russian naval infantry, special operations forces, and other ad hoc groupings. Though operating under the thinnest possible disguise, their fast and covert deployment precluded an effective response by Kiev after which the occupation became a *fait accompli*.[300] On March 1, the new prime minister of Crimea officially called on Russia for assistance and protection, a request that the Kremlin said it would honor. The head of Russia's upper house of Parliament also floated the idea of sending troops to keep the peace.[301] Crimea's referendum was duly held on March 16, with about 95 percent of voters electing to join Russia. The Supreme Council announced Crimea's independence the next day and signed accession documents with Russia on March 18.

The West's response to Russia's Crimean actions came ively rapidly, particularly given Ukraine's history as a Russian satrapy, not a Western one. But how not? Russia's moves were brazen violations of sovereignty. They were land grabs with the blatant use of regular military forces. Like in Georgia, the most decisive Western actions of this period closely tracked changes to Crimea's formal sovereignty and Ukraine's territorial boundaries. On March 3, five days after the introduction of Russian troops into Crimea, the European Union's Foreign Affairs Council voted to abandon preparations for the upcoming G8 meeting in Russia and to consider potential sanctions. The EU heads of state met three days later to prepare a list of people subject to asset freezes and visa bans, as

[300] Michael Kofman, Katya Migacheva, Brian Nichiporuk, Andrew Radin, Olesya Tkacheva, and Jenny Oberholtzer, *Lessons from Russia's Operations in Crimea and Eastern Ukraine*, Report RR1498 (Santa Monica: RAND, 2017), 23.
[301] "Ukraine Crisis: Crimea Leader Appeals to Putin for Help," *BBC News* (March 1, 2014), http://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-26397323 (accessed August 2, 2016).

well as suspend other Russian initiatives like streamlined visa negotiations.[302] President Obama simultaneously issued his first Executive Order on the Ukraine crisis, preparing but not imposing sanctions. On March 16-17, during Crimea's referendum, he pulled the trigger.[303] The White House said that Russia's actions were "dangerous and destabilizing," the strongest language and the greatest attribution to Moscow it had used so far in the conflict.[304] The European Union then imposed sanctions on 21 people from Russia and Crimea. After Putin formally accepted the region into Russia, both the US and EU lists were expanded.[305] These lists were slightly different. The EU sanctioned either local separatist leaders, like the so-called President of Crimea, or Russian officials who had publicly called for the seizure of Ukraine.[306] The United States sanctioned only eleven people at first, but these were figures closer to the center of power such as oligarchs and Putin's advisor Surkov. Critically, the US list attributed blame for the conflict not to the separatists alone, but also to Moscow.[307] After

[302] Council of the European Union, "Timeline: EU restrictive measures in response to the crisis in Ukraine," (July 1, 2016), http://www.consilium.europa.eu/en/policies/sanctions/ukraine-crisis/history-ukraine-crisis/ (accessed September 5, 2016).
[303] U.S. Department of the Treasury, "Ukraine/Russia-Related Sanctions Program," (June 16, 2016), 3, https://www.treasury.gov/resource-center/sanctions/Programs/Documents/ukraine.pdf (accessed November 14, 2017).
[304] The White House, "Statement by the Press Secretary on Ukraine," (March 16, 2014), https://obamawhitehouse.archives.gov/the-press-office/2014/03/16/statement-press-secretary-ukraine (accessed March 15, 2020).
[305] U.S. Department of the Treasury, "Ukraine/Russia-Related Sanctions Program," (June 16, 2016), 3, https://www.treasury.gov/resource-center/sanctions/Programs/Documents/ukraine.pdf (accessed November 14, 2017); Council of the European Union, "Timeline: EU restrictive measures in response to the crisis in Ukraine," (July 1, 2016), http://www.consilium.europa.eu/en/policies/sanctions/ukraine-crisis/history-ukraine-crisis/ (accessed September 5, 2016).
[306] Vincent Morelli, "Ukraine: Current Issues and U.S. Policy," *Congressional Research Service*, RL33460 (August 3, 2016), 24.
[307] Vladimir Socor, "Surkov and Gryzlov: Russia's New Negotiators on Ukraine," *Jamestown Foundation/Eurasia Daily Monitor* Vol. 13, 34 (February 19, 2016), http://www.jamestown.org/single/?tx_ttnews%5Btt_news%5D=45114&no_cache=1#.V9MCvzsqbFI (accessed September 3, 2016).

the annexation was ratified by the Duma on March 20, President Obama dismissed it as "unconstitutional" and the referendum "illegal." Obama also issued another Executive Order authorizing the first sectoral sanctions of the crisis, heightening his response with strategic economic tools to support "the basic principles that govern relations between nations," specifically "respect for sovereignty and territorial integrity – the notion that nations do not simply redraw borders." He conditioned further strategic measures on Russia not escalating the situation further, particularly in Ukraine's east and south.[308] The situation escalated anyway.

The main phase of the Ukraine conflict, from April to August of 2014, differed from the Crimean operation in several ways. The key one involved the enhanced use of proxies. Russia's Crimean victory had barely involved local militias. With slightly more time to plan, it could be subtler in eastern Ukraine. Russia's deniability there was aided by ethnic proxies being the primary agent of control, not Russian troops. It was closer to Gerasimov's vision of hybrid war, with conventional forces coming only at the end, if they were needed at all. Beginning in early April, demonstrators in eastern Ukraine occupied government buildings in the main cities of Donetsk, Luhansk and Kharkov and demanded, among other things, the right to secede and join Russia.[309] From inside the regional government building in Donetsk, they declared a "people's republic" on

[308] The White House, "Statement by the President on Ukraine" (March 20, 2014), https://www.whitehouse.gov/the-press-office/2014/03/20/statement-president-ukraine (accessed August 5, 2016).
[309] David Herszenhorn and Andrew Roth, "In East Ukraine, Protestors Seek Russian Troops," *The New York Times* (April 7, 2014), http://www.nytimes.com/2014/04/08/world/europe/russia-crimea-ukraine-unrest.html (accessed August 5, 2016).

April 7.[310] Those demonstrations were followed on April 12 by armed militant attacks against police stations and other Ukrainian security installations. Unlike Crimea, these attackers did not appear to be disguised Russian troops.[311] They included unconventional units of paramilitaries that seized police and government buildings in places like Slaviansk, a town about 35 miles north of Donetsk. Militia forces quickly replaced the demonstrators who had taken control of government structures in about ten cities in the east and dug in.

But something changed in what had been a fairly assertive Western response to the Crimean operation. Rather than continue to escalate as Russia's campaign widened, it stalled. Stern US statements at the most senior level, which had been very tough at the end of March, flatlined even as unrest spread across the east. Under intense pressure from reporters during a press conference on April 7, White House Press spokesman Jay Carney refused to attribute blame for the demonstrations to Russia. "Circumstances were different in the regions we're talking about" than they were in Crimea, he said, even as he suggested that some demonstrators were "not local residents."[312] Secretary Kerry, speaking on April 17 after days after the unrest had turned violent, likewise refused to explicitly blame Russia – which the US had just sanctioned – instead calling on "all groups to demobilize." In light of what came before and after, his remarks on April 17

[310] "Ukraine Crisis: Protestors declare Donetsk 'republic,'" *BBC News* (April 7, 2014), http://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-26919928 (accessed July 25, 2016).
[311] Andrew Higgins, "Armed Men Seize Police Station in Eastern Ukraine City," *The New York Times* (April 12, 2014) http://www.nytimes.com/2014/04/13/world/europe/ukraine.html (accessed August 4, 2016).
[312] The White House, "Daily Press Briefing by Press Secretary Jay Carney," (April 7, 2014), https://obamawhitehouse.archives.gov/the-press-office/2014/04/07/daily-press-briefing-press-secretary-jay-carney-040714 (accessed March 14, 2020).

bordered on the grotesque. He condemned an alleged threat against the Russian Orthodox Church in Ukraine, praised Lavrov's "constructive" and "good faith" dialogue, and invited Russian monitors onto the ground under the OSCE.[313] Even in his memoirs later, with the benefit of hindsight, Kerry used the language of intrastate war to describe what was happening in Donbas: for example, "Putin also had unleashed something ugly and destructive in the Donbass," with "indiscriminate shelling by separatists." Whereas Crimea was a straight case of invasion by Russian troops.[314]

The leading role of ethnic separatists in the east rather than Russian troops in Crimea seems to have discombobulated the Western response to the continuing unrest. The increased distance between sponsor and proxy seemed to have reset US balancing to almost its pre-Crimea levels, even if, pace Kerry, "everybody knew" what the Russians were doing. The different type of agent projecting Russian power in the east had a delaying effect on the US and EU. It denuded their response: it turned Russia's invasion into something less than interstate war, even if culpability for the violence was ultimately clear. Not only was battlefield intelligence messier than in Crimea, these militants gave the West an opportunity not to escalate, as Kerry repeatedly said he wanted.[315]

On its own the new Ukrainian government's response to the spreading violence sputtered. After the seizure by militants of the police station at Slaviansk

[313] U.S. Department of State, "Remarks EU High Representative Catherine Ashton After their Meeting" (April 17, 2014), https://2009-2017.state.gov/secretary/remarks/2014/04/224947.htm (accessed October 15, 2020).
[314] John Kerry, *Every Day is Extra* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2018), 436-437.
[315] For example, U.S. Department of State, "Remarks EU High Representative Catherine Ashton After their Meeting" (April 17, 2014), https://2009-2017.state.gov/secretary/remarks/2014/04/224947.htm (accessed October 15, 2020).

on April 12, acting Ukrainian President Turchynov announced the start of an anti-terror campaign. He gave the separatists a deadline of 6:00 AM the next morning to lay down their arms.[316] When they did not, the government launched a major attack against Slaviansk and the air base at Kramatorsk to the south with infantry, armored personnel carriers, and airstrikes.[317] The results were disappointing. While the airport was retaken, separatists remained in control of Slaviansk and the militants there became something of local heroes. For the moment, they had enough operational capability to take territory on their own and hold it.

Source: BBC, https://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-28177020 (accessed April 29, 2020)

[316] Conor Humpries and Thomas Grove, "Ukraine gives rebels deadline to disarm or face military operation," *Reuters* (April 13, 2014), http://www.reuters.com/article/us-ukraine-crisis-idUSBREA3A1B520140413 (accessed July 26, 2016).
[317] Tom McCarthy and Alan Yuhas, "Ukraine Crisis: Kiev launches 'anti-terror operation' in the east," *The Guardian* (April 15, 2014) https://www.theguardian.com/world/2014/apr/15/ukraine-military-forces-russia-live-blog (accessed August 1, 2016).

Who were these separatists actually? News reports struggled to describe them: they were, for example, "unsavory young toughs" in "surgical masks."[318] But after a group of OSCE military observers were captured by the rebels in April, the wider world was presented with Igor Strelkov, who announced himself as the leader of the Donbas militia forces. Ukrainian authorities claimed he was a Russian intelligence officer, a retired colonel in the Federal Security Service (FSB) who had fought in Chechnya, Transnistria, and Bosnia.[319] This was likely accurate. Strelkov admitted that he and other fighters had traveled to Donbas from Crimea where they had assisted in the takeover. He also added that about a third of the separatists were not Ukrainian, though this was later walked back to only a tenth.[320]

Strelkov's background pointed to the delicate balancing act Russia was playing in preserving a sufficient shred of deniability to make its proxy warfare effective. It needed to avoid inciting too much intervention by the West while still creating an operationally viable fighting force. The cadre personnel with which it seeded the separatists provided at first it only loose operational control, though this would grow tighter throughout the summer. Russian military and intelligence officers served in the ranks of the ethnic rebels in Donbas. Besides Strelkov, there was Igor Bezler, another ex-GRU officer and commander of

[318] Dan Peleschuk, Twitter Post (April 15, 2014, 5:17 PM), https://twitter.com/dpeleschuk/status/456179415630639104?ref_src=twsrc%5Etfw (accessed September 8, 2016).
[319] International Crisis Group "Ukraine: A Dangerous Winter," Crisis Group Europe Briefing N°235 (December 18, 2014), 8.
[320] Peter Leonard, "This Shadowy Commander Is The Face of Insurgency In Eastern Ukraine," *Business Insider/Associated Press* (April 29, 2014) http://www.businessinsider.com/insurgency-eastern-ukraine-2014-4 (accessed August 4, 2016).

militia forces around Horlivka.[321] Aleksander Borodai, a Russian writer and retired GRU officer, was the first Prime Minister of the Donetsk People's Republic and subsequently the Deputy Prime Minister. He was a Russian national who had fought in Transdniestria, Chechnya, and Tajikistan, and had also worked Malofeev.[322] Vladimir Antyufeyev was brought in from Moscow to replace a native Ukrainian as the top security official in the Donetsk region. He was a Russian national, and had fought in both Transdniestria in Moldova and in the Georgian separatist enclaves of South Ossetia and Abkhazia.[323] There were also others such as Marat Bashirov, with Russian passports and long experience in the post-Soviet frozen conflicts. And Denis Pushilin, the former employee of a Ponzi scheme in Russia and a failed Ukrainian parliamentary candidate, was elected to lead the Donetsk People's Republic.[324]

In terms of fighting ability, the separatist militias were a mixed bag. Many of the separatist units were undisciplined, unorganized, and lacking in major supplies including food.[325] Unlike South Ossetians and Abkhaz militia forces, Russia made no real attempt to regularize the militias, but rather supported select groups with weapons, volunteers, and training. These included the Vostok

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[321] Taras Kuzio, *Ukraine: Democratization, Corruption, and the New Russian Imperialism* (Santa Barbara, CA: Praeger, 2015), 102.
[322] Andrew Roth, "Former Russian rebels trade war in Ukraine for posh life in Moscow," *The Washington Post* (September 16, 2015), https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/former-russian-rebels-trade-war-in-ukraine-for-posh-life-in-moscow/2015/09/13/6b71f862-3b8c-11e5-b34f-4e0a1e3a3bf9_story.html (accessed September 9, 2016); Toal, 77.
[323] Gabriela Baczynska and Aleksandar Vasovic, "Pushing locals aside, Russians take top rebel posts in east Ukraine, *Reuters* (July 27, 2014), http://www.reuters.com/article/us-ukraine-crisis-rebels-insight-idUSKBN0FW07020140727 (accessed September 11, 2016).
[324] "Ukraine Crisis: Security guard job was boring, says 'prime minister' of Donetsk," *The Telegraph* (April 20, 2014), http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/worldnews/europe/ukraine/10776299/Ukraine-crisis-Security-guard-job-was-boring-says-prime-minister-of-Donetsk.html (accessed August 5, 2016).
[325] International Crisis Group (December 18, 2014), 12.

battalion and the Oplot battalion, led by the same Zakharchenko.[326] They were relatively capable: for example, the Vostok battalion was regarded by the Ukrainians as high quality and was well equipped, allegedly the result of its ties to Russia's FSB. Vostok was, in fact, eponymous with a since-disbanded Chechen unit of the Russian army that took part in the 2008 Georgia war. The presence of ethnic Chechens and other Russian volunteers in the unit suggested that the unit had been resurrected.[327] Some of the Chechens were fighters linked to Ramzan Kadyrov, the pro-Russian president of Chechnya.[328] The Oplot Battalion, with its ties to the DNR's President, was similarly well kitted out. Zakharchenko claimed that 1,200 of his fighters had undergone military training on Russian soil.[329] Heavy weapons were also provided. When three Ukrainian helicopters were shot down by rebels near Slaviansk, resulting in the death of an army general, Ukraine's military claimed that the rebels were using Russian-supplied anti-aircraft weapons, including the Buk-M1 missile launcher that would shoot down Malaysia Airlines flight MH17.[330] This was later confirmed by international investigators and other fact-finding groups.[331] Russian personnel also played a combat advisory role, guiding separatist combat forces fighting in the front line.

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[326] Ibid.
[327] Alice Speri, "Yes, There Are Chechen Fighters in Ukraine, and Nobody Knows Who Sent Them There," *Vice News* (May 28, 2014), https://news.vice.com/article/yes-there-are-chechen-fighters-in-ukraine-and-nobody-knows-who-sent-them-there (accessed September 20, 2016).
[328] Courtney Weaver, "Chechens join pro-Russians in Battle for Ukraine," *Financial Times* (May 27, 2014), http://www.ft.com/cms/s/dcf5e16e-e5bc-11e3-aeef-00144feabdc0 (accessed August 4, 2016).
[329] Shaun Walker, "Ukraine rebel says he has 1,200 fighters 'trained in Russia' under his command," (August 16, 2014), https://www.theguardian.com/world/2014/aug/16/ukraine-fighters-russia-top-rebel-leader (accessed September 1, 2016).
[330] "Obituary: Major General Serhiy Kulchytsky," *BBC News* (May 29, 2014), http://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-27620843 (accessed August 5, 2016).
[331] Bellingcat Investigations, "MH17 - Potential Suspects and Witnesses from the 53rd Anti-Aircraft Missile Brigade," (February 23, 2016), 1, https://www.bellingcat.com/wp-content/uploads/2016/02/53rd-report-public.pdf (accessed September 24, 2016).

As the conflict developed, this would reportedly grow to include operational control at the battalion level of all separatist militias.[332]

But as long as the conflict involved some sort of popular movement with irregular forces against the Ukrainian military, Russia still had propaganda leverage. The more organic to the population the separatists appeared, the less they looked like agents of interstate Russian aggression. Kiev's Anti-Terrorism Operation (ATO) was also helping radicalize the population in the east, which played to Russia's advantage domestically in Ukraine and also forestalling Western intervention.[333] Russian officials harped on the theme of Kiev inciting a humanitarian crisis – for example, the early alleged threat to members of the Russian Orthodox Church. Russian President Dmitry Medvedev warned of a "civil war" and Russia's human rights representative said that events "are beginning to develop under the worst-case scenario."[334] During a call with UN Secretary-General Ban Ki Moon, Putin said he expected the international community to condemn Ukraine's actions.[335] A Kremlin-sponsored documentary released later portrayed Russian policy in Ukraine as reactive and essentially a rescue mission to save ethnic Russians.[336]

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[332] International Crisis Group, "Russia and the Separatists in Eastern Ukraine," Crisis Group Europe Briefing N°79 (February 5, 2016), 8.
[333] Toal, 259.
[334] Alyssa de Carbonnel, "Russia says deeply concerned over reports of casualties in eastern Ukraine," *Reuters* (April 15, 2014) http://uk.reuters.com/article/uk-ukraine-crisis-russia-reports-idUKBREA3E1CE20140415 (accessed July 29, 2016).
[335] "Russia. U.N. Secretary-General Wrangle Over Ukraine's Use of Force," *NBC News* (April 15, 2014), http://www.nbcnews.com/storyline/ukraine-crisis/russia-u-n-secretary-general-wrangle-over-ukraines-use-force-n81136 (accessed August 3, 2016).
[336] Toal, 216-217.

During most of April, [redacted] capabilities seemed to strike the right balance of military capability and blowback. The same day Strelkov appeared, separatists took control of the regional administrative center in Luhansk. In late April, President Turchynov admitted that Kiev no longer controlled the Luhansk and Donetsk regions. The fiercest fighting took place around Donetsk, as both the emerging separatist militias and Ukrainian government troops jockeyed for key territory and infrastructure like the airport. As combat continued, the US began to come around to the realization that more counterpressure would need to be applied. Weeks after the fighting restarted, US Secretary of State John Kerry finally broke *omerta* and explicitly blamed Russia:

> "The simple reality is, you can't resolve a crisis when only one side is willing to do what is necessary to avoid a confrontation…Nobody should doubt Russia's hand in this. As NATO's Supreme Allied Commander in Europe wrote this week, "What is happening in eastern Ukraine is a military operation that is well planned and organized and we assess that it is being carried out at the direction of Russia." Our intelligence community tells me that Russia's intelligence and military intelligence services and special operators are playing an active role in destabilizing eastern Ukraine with personnel, weapons, money, operational planning, and coordination."[337]

On April 28, the United States rolled out its first new sanctions on Russia since the seizure of Crimea, targeting seven Putin-linked oligarchs and officials including Igor Sechin, the head of Rosneft. The concurrent statements made by members of Obama's Administration were studies in the subjunctive. The President and others noted that Russia was bearing heavy costs of its actions, including the downgrading of Russian debt to junk status. But many of the effects cited were occurring independently of the Western governmental reaction – like

[337] U.S. Department of State, "Remarks on Ukraine," (April 24, 2014), https://2009-2017.state.gov/secretary/remarks/2014/04/225166.htm (accessed March 9, 2020).

the bond devaluation, which actually took place three days before the new sanctions.[338] And President Obama and other members of his Administration actually took pains to suggest how limited – incremental – these new sanctions were. They promised wider economic consequences – sectoral sanctions – if there were clearer signs of Russian violations of Ukrainian sovereignty, particularly troops moving across the border.[339]

It aided Russia's deniability during this period that Moscow's looser operational control over the separatists was matched by looser political control. The separatists' goals differed from Russia's in key ways, particularly on the issue of how much political autonomy they should have. Putin publicly urged them in early May to postpone holding votes on independence and to support Ukraine's presidential elections later in the month instead. It would build the "necessary conditions for dialogue," he said.[340] Russia was not seeking an independent Donbas, but one that would blur Ukrainian sovereignty. Neither independence nor annexation would offer Russia a similar strategic ability to pressure Kiev in the future. Both would be too clean cut a resolution to the conflict, creating bright lines of sovereignty and raising the cost externally of pressuring Ukraine in the future – as well as likely incite a strong reaction in the

[338] Anna Andrianova, "Russia Debt Rating Cut to Step Above Junk at S&P," *Bloomberg* (April 25, 2014), https://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2014-04-25/russia-s-rating-cut-to-bbb-by-standard-poor-s (accessed March 16, 2020).
[339] Karen DeYoung and Michael Birnbaum, "U.S. imposes new sanctions on Russia," *The Washington Post* (April 28, 2014), https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/national-security/us-imposes-new-sanctions-on-russia/2014/04/28/974c579e-ced6-11e3-b812-0c92213941f4_story.html (accessed March 10, 2020).
[340] Michael Birnbaum, Fredrick Kunkle, and Simon Denyer, "Putin calls for postponement of separatists' referendum in eastern Ukraine," *The Washington Post* (May 7, 2014), https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/europe/putin-calls-for-postponement-of-separatists-referendum-in-eastern-ukraine/2014/05/07/a041c261-b47f-47ae-8f33-51ef9d1b92c8_story.html?tid=a_inl (accessed August 6, 2016).

moment, as had the Crimea annexation. For the separatists, however, marks of sovereignty like an independence vote would increase the power and security of the leadership by giving them more legitimacy. This would diversify their support base and make them less dependent on the vicissitudes of Russian policy. Moreover, declaring independence might well force Putin to commit more deeply to their project if there was a major reaction from Kiev, Brussels, and Washington. They duly held a referendum on May 11, and over 90 percent of voters chose independence.[341]

Intensification, mid-May 2014 to September 2014

Unfortunately for Russia, whatever the level of Western opposition, the separatists' fighting capability began to be insufficient in the face of increased Ukrainian pressure. The balance between deniability and combat power had swung too far. In late May, Ukraine's offensive finally kicked into gear and began to reclaim increasingly larger swaths of the territory it had surrendered a month earlier. Ukrainian paratroopers and gunships launched a successful counterattack on the Donetsk airport terminal building (both a prestige prize and key infrastructure) on May 27 that left at least thirty rebels dead. Ukrainian forces regained control of the crucial port city of Mariupol on June 13, after withdrawing in May in the face of violent demonstrations. A joint ceasefire lasted for a week until the end of June, when the offensive resumed. Kiev regained control over Slaviansk on July 5 and eliminated small rebel enclaves elsewhere in

[341] "East Ukraine separatists seek union with Russia," *BBC News* (May 12, 2014), http://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-27369980 (accessed August 7, 2016).

the two oblasts. Separatist control shrank to the core cities of Donetsk and Luhansk which themselves were in danger of being encircled.[342] Concurrently, Western opposition to Russian actions in Ukraine softened slightly. Kerry had a cordial meeting on Ukraine with Lavrov and European leaders at the G-7 in France on June 5. A month later, Assistant Secretary Nuland's public testimony to the Senate Foreign Relations committee was the model of de-escalation, as she stressed non-security initiatives like fighting corruption and constitutional reform, and called for de-escalation and addressing the "legitimate concerns" of ethnic Russians.

As the separatists' battlefield fortunes waned, Russia began to provide them with heavier and more advanced weaponry, though still largely without direct operational control. In mid-July, videos of BTRs and T-64 tanks in the separatist ranks began to appear.[343] On July 14, the rebels downed a large Ukrainian transport aircraft with sophisticated anti-aircraft missiles. And most critically, on July 17, separatists used a Russian-made Buk missile launcher to shoot down a Malaysia Airlines passenger jet MH17, killing all 298 on board. Ukrainian officials believed Strelkov's forces were responsible.[344] The dead were primarily European citizens, mostly Dutch, and the act – combined with the growing reports of heavier Russian involvement – incited the strongest Western response to date. First, European officials expanded the EU's list of asset freezes

[342] Toal, 264.
[343] U.S. Department of State, "Russia's Continuing Support for Armed Separatists in Ukraine and Ukraine's Efforts Toward Peace, Unity, Stability" (July 14, 2014), https://2009-2017.state.gov/r/pa/prs/ps/2014/07/229270.htm (accessed March 4, 2020).
[344] International Crisis Group (February 5, 2016), 13.

and visa bans to include some of the Putin advisors on the US list. On July 24, the EU then expanded its sanctions to target Russia's military, energy, and financial sectors. The United States elevated its rhetoric to explicitly condemn Russia's role, and imposed sectoral sanctions (though still relatively weak ones, such as limiting US financing for some Russian energy firms). In a statement about the MH17 action, President Obama targeted specifically Russia's support to the separatists and its complicity in lending the separatists advanced weaponry. "We know," he said, "that these separatists have received a steady flow of support from Russia. This includes arms and training. It includes heavy weapons, and it includes anti-aircraft weapons."[345] Obama called for a cease-fire to allow an international investigation.

The downing of MH17 highlighted the drawbacks of Russia's looser control. It was obviously not in Russia's interest to incur the wrath of the international community for a strategically valueless target. The separatist force at this point had less discipline and more agency: given the opportunity, their tactical operations could incur strategic costs. Making matters worse, the heavier equipment might draw attention but it did not win the war by itself. The rebels' military situation had become critical by the end of July. Slaviansk fell on July 5. On July 23, Ukrainian troops penetrated the northwestern corner of Donetsk city, prompting insurgents to fall back from several outlying suburbs. At the end of July, Donetsk Prime Minister Alexander Borodai asked for cease-fire

[345] The White House, "Statement by the President on Ukraine" (July 18, 2014), https://www.whitehouse.gov/the-press-office/2014/07/18/statement-president-ukraine (accessed August 8, 2016).

negotiations. Strelkov bitterly accused the Russians of preparing to let Donbas collapse. On July 28, the Ukrainian army announced it had surrounded Horlivka, the last large city north of Donetsk. Less than two weeks later, Strelkov said that Donetsk had been "completely ounded."

The battlefield reverses and strategically damaging blowback from the MH17 incident spurred Moscow to more active involvement in the conflict. It tightened its control. In mid-August, the rebel leadership was sacked. Strelkov was removed from command of separatist forces and his nominal superior Prime Minister Borodai resigned. The head of rebel forces in Luhansk also stepped down, and operatives seasoned in interstate conflict were brought in.[346] Vladimir Antyufeyev, who had previously been the long-standing security chief in Transniestria, was appointed to replace Khodakovsky.[347] With the leadership changes came more direct Russian support, including committing combat troops to the fight. Though d failed to act on the separatists' more grandiose aspirations for a Novorossiya state, it was not willing to let the remaining enclaves be extinguished. There were reports of additional heavy weaponry entering the separatist enclaves, such as tanks and armored personnel carriers.[348] For the first time there were complaints of shelling from Russian territory on August 11, and Ukrainian forces allegedly engaged a Russian armored column inside Ukraine on August 14.

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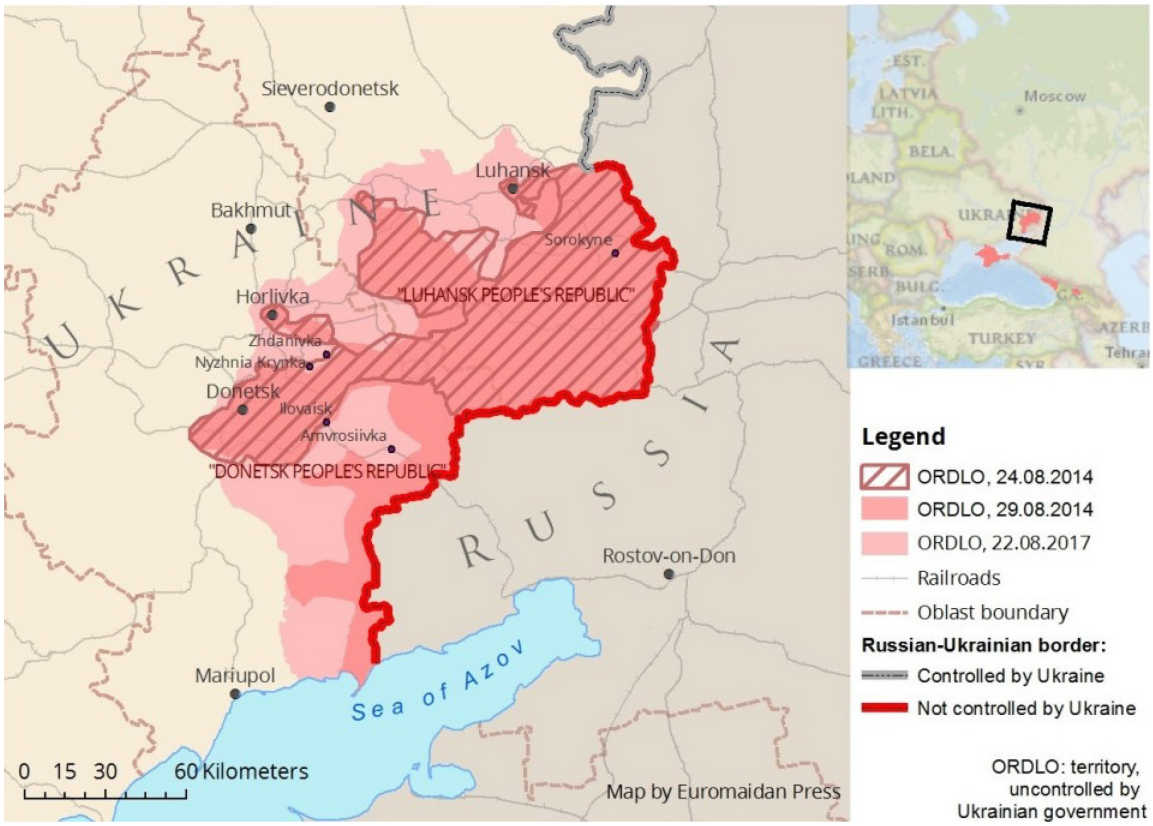
[346] Ed Adamczyk, "Ukrainian separatist military leader Strelkov resigns," *UPI* (August 14, 2014), http://www.upi.com/Top_News/World-News/2014/08/14/Ukrainian-separatist-military-leader-Strelkov-resigns/1071408033632/ (accessed August 10, 2016).
[347] Toal, 266.
[348] Michael Weiss, "All Is Not Well in Novorossia," *Foreign Policy* (July 12, 2014), http://foreignpolicy.com/2014/07/12/all-is-not-well-in-novorossiya/ (accessed August 9, 2016).

Verified Russian intervention came a week later during the decisive battle in the east. Ukrainian forces were attempting to capture the strategic railway hub of Ilovaisk, which would seal off Donetsk from the east. After a failed attempt to storm the town on August 7, Ukrainian artillery began to shell Ilovaisk intermittently. The Ukrainians tried again during the day of August 18, with no success. Led by the volunteer Donbas battalion, government forces finally entered the city later that night. They fought house-to-house and made progress against members of the separatists' Oplot unit.[349] The Ukrainians pushed on during August 19 and 20, extending further and further to the east, to the village of Torez, before they were halted by multiple counterattacks. By August 20, understrength Ukrainian forces were in control of most of Ilovaisk.[350] As the remaining troops spread out through the city, volunteer militias leading the offensive requested reinforcements. None arrived. Defense of the city fell to the Donbas battalion and scattershot formations: one company of regular troops and some additional volunteer fighters.[351] The remaining Ukrainian troops began to report seeing Russian soldiers when they were met with a crushing, modern artillery- and drone-backed counterattack that was suspected to have come from the Russian military.[352] They fell back along the western road in chaos, nearly defenseless in their disarray. The United States blasted Russia's "flagrant"

[349] "Government forces clearing Iloviask of snipers," *Ukrinform* (August 19, 2014), http://www.ukrinform.net/rubric-ukrnews/1697921-government_forces_clearing_ilovaisk_of_snipers_325474.html (accessed September 3, 2016).
[350] "Ukraine conflict: fierce battle for town of Iloviask," *BBC News* (August 20, 2014), http://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-28866283 (accessed September 4, 2016).
[351] "Abandoned Donbas Battalion fights on," *Kyiv Post* (August 24, 2014), https://web.archive.org/web/20140825135333/http://www.kyivpost.com/content/ukraine/abandoned-donbas-battalion-fights-on-361886.html (accessed September 5, 2016).
[352] International Crisis Group (December 18, 2014), 2-3.

violation of international law in response to reports of Russian military vehicles in Ukraine. But by August 24, no regular reinforcements had arrived and other government militia groups had retreated, leaving the remaining fighters trapped in a hopeless pocket. Putin made a public – if cynical - call for a corridor to allow the trapped Ukrainian forces to leave; nonetheless, fighting continued during the retreat, killing an estimated 1,000 Ukrainian troops.[353]



Source: Euromaidan Press, http://euromaidanpress.com/2017/08/23/probe-into-ukraines-largest-military-defeat-at-ilovaisk/ (accessed May 19, 2020).

It was a crushing optic: August 24 was also by coincidence Ukraine's Independence Day, and Ukrainian President Petro Poroshenko had insisted upon a military parade at the same time his troops were howling for reinforcements in

[353] International Crisis Group (December 18, 2014), 3.

Ilovaisk. On August 28, NATO officials assessed that over 1,000 Russians were operating within the separatist areas and another 20,000 were stationed near the border. These troops were equipped with heavy weapons and engaging in direct combat.[354] The Russian intervention was operationally successful. The Ukrainian forces retreated, losing much of the territory they had regained over the past two months. After a week of fighting, the rebels held about 40 percent of the Donetsk oblast and slightly less of the Luhansk oblast.

During this period of increased Russian direct involvement in the fighting, Russia also retained tight political control over the separatists. During ceasefire negotiations in late August and early September 2014 in Minsk, the key decisions were made by Russia, and it decided to settle up. The subsequent Minsk agreement signed on September 5 offered the separatists a special status and local elections in exchange for Ukrainian control of the border. The catch – which Russia would exploit as part of its proxy strategy – was that nothing was said about sequencing. Even though some separatists wanted to continue their August offensive and potentially push on to create a more viable state, Moscow forced them to sign.[355] Those who opposed Russian strategic decisions like Andrei Purgin, the cofounder of the independent Donetsk state, were arrested or dismissed.[356] Strelkov, who had been critical of Surkov's dialing back the

[354] Adrian Croft, "More than 1,000 Russian troops operating in Ukraine: NATO," *Reuters* (August 28, 2014), http://www.reuters.com/article/us-ukraine-crisis-nato-idUSKBN0GS1D220140828 (accessed August 10, 2016).
[355] International Crisis Group (December 18, 2014), 8.
[356] Kim Sengupta, "Ukraine crisis: Former separatist leader who fell foul of the Kremlin maybe be sidelined – but he will not be silenced," *The Independent* (September 24, 2015), http://www.independent.co.uk/news/world/europe/ukraine-crisis-former-separatist-leader-who-fell-foul-of-the-kremlin-maybe-be-sidelined-but-he-will-10515969.html (accessed September 12, 2016).

orussiya project, was returned to Russia.[357] Others were killed under mysterious circumstances, including Aleksander Bednov, who was apparently murdered by the separatist leader of the Luhansk region, Igor Plotnitsky.[358] There was very little evidence of independent decision-making among the separatist enclaves in the east.

Russia paid a heavier price as the veneer of its nonintervention cracked. The Minsk agreement did not stop the EU from expanding its sector sanctions on Russia, even after the ceasefire came into place. On September 11, it announced it would ban weapons sales, tightened restrictions on dual-use goods, and curtailed lending to five Russian state-owned companies, three energy companies, and three defense companies, as well as cooperation on energy exploration. The US joined these efforts, sanctioning Russia's largest bank, a major arms conglomerate, and five energy companies. President Obama called Russia's actions illegal, noted the "heavily armed Russian forces" in the country, and said that the US had yet to see conclusive evidence Russian efforts to destabilize Ukraine had ceased.[359] These sanctions were not crushing: indeed, per Obama, they were not meant to be. And on balance, for the Russians, they were likely worth it.

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[357] Toal, 267.
[358] Catherine Fitzpatrick, "Batman Battalion members Say in Interview that Bednov and Guards Were Killed in Ambush," *The Interpreter* [blog] (January 2, 2015), http://www.interpretermag.com/ukraine-live-day-319-ukrainian-police-arrest-man-who-broke-lifenews-camera-during-bandera-procession/ (accessed September 6, 2016).
[359] The White House, "Statement by the President on New Sanctions Related to Russia," (September 11, 2014), https://obamawhitehouse.archives.gov/the-press-office/2014/09/11/statement-president-new-sanctions-related-russia (accessed March 4, 2020).

Pawn-Grabbing: Second Donbas Crisis, October 2014-March 2015

Moscow sustained a high level of support for its proxies after Minsk. It moved heavy equipment and troops into the rebel areas in October 2014 and expanded training among rebel units.[360] In November, NATO commander General Philip Breedlove warned that "Material, equipment, armored weapons, and supplies continue to flow into eastern Ukraine." The OSCE claimed it had spotted unidentified armored columns in separatist areas manned by troops without insignia, similar to those in Crimea.[361] At the local level, the fighting never really stopped. The cease-fire, said General Breedlove, was "in name  ." There were near-daily violations of the ceasefire around the urban center of Donetsk, including artillery shelling of civilian areas. Between the implementation of Minsk and mid-November, the UN estimated that 957 people were killed in the conflict and the number of displaced persons almost doubled to nearly half a million.[362] The heaviest fighting came at the city's strategically located airport in late September and October, as rebel forces attempted to push Ukrainian forces out of the facility they had seized in May.

But after the initial post-Ilovaisk intervention American interest in balancing Russia sagged. The most visible sign of this was the US shifting its emphasis to urging Ukrainian political changes and the separatists' culpability for

[360] International Crisis Group (April 1, 2015), 5.
[361] Steve Scherer, "NATO commander concerned by armored convoys entering Ukraine from Russia," *Reuters* (November 11, 2014), http://www.reuters.com/article/us-ukraine-crisis-nato-idUSKCN0IV1I820141111 (accessed August 8).
[362] United Nations Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights, "Serious human rights violations persist in eastern Ukraine despite tenuous ceasefire" (November 20, 2014), http://www.ohchr.org/en/NewsEvents/Pages/DisplayNews.aspx?NewsID=15316&LangID=E (accessed August 9, 2016).

the conflict rather than their sponsor's. The Minsk agreement had taken much of the energy behind American balancing against Russia and codified it into pressure on the Ukrainian government to enact political reform. It thus functionally served to justify and normalize Russian involvement in Ukraine. In a statement by President Obama during a visit with Ukrainian President Poroshenko shortly after the ceasefire, Obama made reference to Russian "aggression" that violated the sovereignty and territorial integrity of Ukraine, but in literally the same sentence linked it to Ukraine's need to undertake political reforms.[363] In October, amidst the fighting at the Donetsk airport, US Secretary of State John Kerry praised the Minsk process, claimed the ceasefire was holding, and stressed – in the same sentence – the need for a new election law.[364] Other US statements tended to focus on the separatists, not their sponsors. On November 9, NSC spokesperson Bernadette Meehan noted that the fighting had "intensified," but blamed the rebels, and used toned-down language that merely urged Moscow to comply with Minsk.[365] Two weeks later, another senior US official referred to bellicose Russian statements about never letting Donbas be defeated as "a little

[363] The White House, "Remarks by President Obama and President Poroshenko of Ukraine after Bilateral Meeting" (September 18, 2014), https://obamawhitehouse.archives.gov/the-press-office/2014/09/18/remarks-president-obama-and-president-poroshenko-ukraine-after-bilateral (accessed November 12, 2017).
[364] U.S. Department of State, "Remarks before Meeting With German Foreign Minister Frank-Walter Steinmeier" (October 22, 2015), https://2009-2017.state.gov/secretary/remarks/2015/10/248461.htm (accessed November 8, 2017).
[365] The White House, "Statement by NSC Spokesperson Bernadette Meehan on the Situation in Eastern Ukraine" (November 9, 2014), https://obamawhitehouse.archives.gov/the-press-office/2014/11/09/statement-nsc-spokesperson-bernadette-meehan-situation-eastern-ukraine (accessed March 8, 2020).

strange…since it was the separatists who [were] on the offensive everywhere."[366] Not the Russians.

Russia also sought to manage the degree of the separatists' political sovereignty, too much of which could bring quicker Western consequences down on Moscow than could changes on the ground. This was an area where the separatists' and their sponsor's goals diverged. It benefited the local leaders of Donbass to have more and more the trappings of sovereignty, while it benefited Russia for them to have some sovereignty, and certainly survive, but maintain enough fuzziness around along the line of control that pressure on Kiev could be ratcheted up or down while lowering the risk of significant consequences. The separatist-controlled areas refused to participate in Ukraine's elections of October 26, which saw a landslide for the pro-Western parties, and instead held their own elections against Russian advice.[367] The vote confirmed Alexander Zakharchenko and Igor Plotnisky as the leaders of Donetsk and Luhansk, respectively.[368] Politically, Ukraine and the Donbas were growing further apart. The new reformist-dominated parliament in Kiev overwhelmingly voted on December 23 to revoke Ukraine's non-aligned status and seek closer ties with the West,

[366] The White House, "Background Briefing by Senior Administration Officials on the Vice President's Trip to Morocco, Ukraine and Turkey" (November 20, 2014), https://obamawhitehouse.archives.gov/the-press-office/2014/11/20/background-briefing-senior-administration-officials-vice-presidents-trip (accessed March 4, 2020).
[367] "Good voters, not such good guys," *The Economist* (November 1, 2014), http://www.economist.com/news/-europe/21629375-poll-results-were-promising-future-ukraine-dauntingly-difficult-good-voters (accessed August 11, 2016); International Election Observation Mission, "Statement of Preliminary Findings and Conclusions" (October 26, 2014), http://www.osce.org/odihr/elections/ukraine/126043?download=true (accessed August 11, 2014).
[368] Thomas Grove and Richard Balmforth, "Election crisis deepens after rebel vote in east," *Reuters* (November 3, 2014), http://www.reuters.com/article/us-ukraine-crisis-rebel-election-idUSKBN0IL3AP20141103 (accessed August 12, 2016).

including NATO membership. This was a clear red line for Russia, just as it had been with Georgia in 2008. Putin's spokesman in November had asked for "a 100 percent guarantee that no one would think about Ukraine joining NATO." Russia's Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov called the vote "unproductive."[369]

Beginning in January, the separatists began a major new military offensive amid a dramatic increase in artillery and small arms exchanges. This met a stronger, more immediate response from the West than had the proxy operation during the spring. The operation had offensive goals, the seizing of territory in the Debaltseve salient, around Donetsk, and in the south to create a land link to Crimea. They particularly aimed at capturing Mariupol and the Donetsk airport, which would strengthen the separatists' strategic position.

[369] David Herszenhorn, "Ukraine Vote Takes Nation a Step Closer to NATO," *The New York Times* (December 23, 2014), http://www.nytimes.com/2014/12/24/world/europe/ukraine-parliament-nato-vote.html (accessed August 12, 2016).

Source: BBC, https://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-27308526 (accessed May 21, 2020)

At first, the close proximity of the combatants after the cease-fire blurred the lines of what was a qualitative change in the violence. The separatists' January offensive began out of near-daily ceasefire violations, and it first exhibited the kind of ambiguous, low-level fighting that had hindered an early Western response in South Ossetia in August 2008. During bitter fighting for the Donetsk airport terminal in mid-January, enemy combatants were often on different floors of the same building for days at a time. Pushed out of several levels of the terminal building on January 14, Ukrainian forces recaptured most of the facility in a counter-offensive three days later that pushed up to the strategic Putyilivskiy Bridge between the city and the airport.[370] On January 20, a group of separatists seized control of several floors of the facility and collapsed one of the sections onto many of the remaining Ukrainian troops. That facilitated a complete takeover by January 21. Separatist forces in Donetsk struck out west three days later towards their second target, the regional center of Mariupol. Strategically situated at the north of the Russian-dominated Sea of Azov, it also lay along the strip of land linking Russian-occupied Crimea to separatist-held Donetsk. Mariupol, which was serving as the government's capital of the Donetsk province in lieu of Donetsk, had briefly fallen into the hands of rebels in May. It was retaken by Ukrainian forces in June 2014, but lay only 10 miles from the final cease-fire line at the time of the Minsk agreement. On January 24, a

[370] "Ukraine conflict: Battles rage in Donetsk and Luhansk," *BBC News* (January 19, 2015), http://www.bbc.com/-news/world-europe-30878406 (accessed August 13, 2016).

major rocket barrage struck the city, killing 30 people, as Zakharchenko announced a new offensive.[371]

But as its offensive widened and began to succeed militarily – and became clearly an offensive – Russia's links to its proxies became less deniable and brought far more rapid balancing. US Secretary of State John Kerry called the renewed fighting "a blatant land grab."[372] A senior UN official called the Mariupol shelling a "war crime," echoing Poroshenko's language, and the OSCE monitors called it "indiscriminate" and "reckless."[373] NATO Secretary-General Jens Stoltenberg warned he had seen "a substantial increase in Russian heavy equipment such as tanks, artillery, and advanced air defense systems" entering Ukraine.[374] At a news conference the next day, President Obama said he was "deeply concerned" about the violence and that he would "look at all options that are available to us short of military confrontation to try and address this issue."[375] Kerry called the Mariupol attack "horrific" and condemned "Russia's irresponsible and dangerous decision" to supply them heavy weapons.

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[371] "Rockets kill 30 in Mariupol as rebels launch offensive," *BBC News* (January 24, 2015), http://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-30967949 (accessed July 15, 2016).
[372] "Ukraine conflict: US accuses rebels of 'land grab,'" *BBC News* (January 22, 2015), http://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-30928107 (accessed August 14, 2016).
[373] Louis Charbonneau and Michelle Nichols, "Attacks on civilians in Mariupol, Ukraine were war crime-UN," *Reuters* (January 27, 2015) http://in.reuters.com/article/Ukraine-crisis-un-idINKBN0KZ26J20150126; Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe, "OSCE Chief Monitor in Ukraine condemns Mariupol shelling as reckless, indiscriminate and disgraceful attack on innocent civilians, including women and children," (January 24, 2015), http://www.osce.org/ukraine-smm/136031 (accessed August 17, 2016).
[374] North Atlantic Treaty Organization, "NATO Secretary General statement on the attack on Mariupol," (January 24, 2015), http://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/news_116852.htm (accessed August 15, 2016).
[375] Roman Olearchyk and Victor Mallet, "Ukraine crisis: Obama threatens more Russia sanctions," *Financial Times* (January 25, 2015), http://www.ft.com/cms/s/0/1f645c04-a4a5-11e4-b943-00144feab7de.html#axzz4H9x9rsHF (accessed August 18, 2016).

A third major target of the separatists' offensive was the strategic crossroads city of Debaltseve, northeast of Donetsk. Debaltseve lay in a Ukrainian salient caught between Donetsk and Luhansk. It was a major rail and road junction connecting the two separatist capitals to each other and also the Russian cities of Volgograd and Rostov-on-Don, Moscow's eastern district military headquarters. Separatists began to exchange artillery fire with the remaining Ukrainian forces in the Debaltseve pocket from January 17 to January 20.[376] Rebels assaulted several Ukrainian checkpoints in the vicinity of Debaltseve over the next week, overrunning the small village of Vuhlehirsk on January 29. Vuhlehirsk was only a few miles by road from Debaltseve proper, and was one of the key defensive buffers for the critical main supply route M-03. After its fall, rebel sappers and artillery were able to direct fire onto the road, severely disrupting traffic.

Western reaction seemed inevitable. The EU held a crisis meeting of foreign ministers the same day Vuhlehirsk fell. There, they identified potential additional sanctions on Russia, primarily visa bans and asset freezes on more individuals. The United States also threatened stronger measures. For the first time, Kerry hinted on February 4 that the US was considering sending lethal aid to Ukraine. So far the Obama Administration had only offered non-lethal supplies, such as first aid, night-vision goggles, and body armor, despite some domestic calls for more active measures. Other US officials acknowledged the

[376] Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe, "Latest from OSCE Special Monitoring Mission (SMM) to Ukraine based on information received as of 18:00 (Kyiv time), 20 January 2015," (January 21, 2015) http://www.osce.org/ukraine-smm/135671 (accessed August 20, 2016).

situation was "dire." They directly criticized Moscow for "fueling the fire" with "new weapons, new advice, new lethality, and new training," and raised the possibility of new sanctions.[377] The sanctions to date – the same personal sanctions and particularly the sectoral sanctions on Russian companies – were having some economic effect, but not apparently enough. The ratings agency S&P downgraded Russian government bonds on January 26, lowering them to BB+ levels with a negative outlook. It was the second time Russian debt had been downgraded since the start of the Ukraine crisis in 2014, and left it one step above junk status.[378] The ruble had likewise declined, losing roughly half of its value against the dollar.

Critically, despite Kerry's threat, European efforts to win Putin's agreement on a modified version of Minsk detracted from balancing Moscow's proxies in the battlefield, where they would gain ground during and after the negotiations. On February 5, German Chancellor Angela Merkel and French President Francois Hollande met with Poroshenko in Ukraine before flying to Moscow the next day to kick off a week of negotiations.[379] This stagnated the counter-momentum: the Obama Administration did not again raise the prospect of arming the Ukrainians, which was a non-starter for the Europeans anyway. And it had no effect on Russia's proxies, now reequipped and advancing in some places

[377] U.S. Department of State, "Background Briefing En Route Kiev, Ukraine" (February 4, 2015), https://obamawhitehouse.archives.gov/the-press-office/2014/11/20/background-briefing-senior-administration-officials-vice-presidents-trip (accessed March 2, 2020).
[378] Anna Adrianova and Ksenia Galouchko, "Russia Credit Rating Is Cut to Junk by S&P for the First Time in a Decade," *Bloomberg* (January 26, 2015) http://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2015-01-26/russia-credit-rating-cut-to-junk-by-s-p-for-first-time-in-decade (accessed July 20, 2016).
[379] Gregory White, Julian Barnes, and Laurence Norman, "Moscow Talks Fail to Clinch Ukraine Peace Deal," *The Wall Street Journal* (February 6, 2015), http://www.wsj.com/articles/hollande-merkel-aim-for-peace-deal-in-moscow-1423211775 (accessed August 3, 2016).

with Russian military accompaniment. On February 9, separatist forces captured the critical town of Lovynove, which lay directly on the main highway between Kiev and Debaltseve, nearly sealing off the Ukrainian troops close to the city. Government sources claimed that Russian mercenaries and regulars including the 52nd Spetsnaz Regiment were directly involved with the capture of the town.[380] It was left in the hands of the Donetsk separatists, who were then reinforced by Russian armor, including at least ten tanks and an armored personnel carrier.[381] Due to communications breakdowns, Ukrainian forces did not get the word that the road was cut and several vehicles were ambushed and destroyed.[382] About 2,500 troops were left trapped in Debaltseve.[383]

Where they were unsupported by Russian forces, the separatists were weaker. About 200 km south, Ukrainian volunteer groups launched a surprise counterattack against the town of Shyrokyne on February 10. Shyrokyne had been captured by the separatists amidst the low-level fighting in October, after the Minsk protocol was signed, and had served as a waypoint for rebel forces attacking Mariupol.[384] Poroshenko's administration stated that the attack was to

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[380] Viktor Kovalenko, "Debaltseve Diary 20: The Capture of Lohvynove," *Viktor Kovalenko's Blog* (November 12, 2015), https://viktorkovalenko.wordpress.com/2015/11/12/debaltseve-diary-20-capture-lohvynove/ (accessed August 21, 2016).
[381] Viktor Kovalenko, "Debaltseve Diary 21: First Days of 'Encirclement,'" *Viktor Kovalenko's Blog* (May 18, 2016), https://viktorkovalenko.wordpress.com/2016/05/18/debaltseve-diary-21-first-days-of-encirclement/ (accessed August 21, 2016).
[382] Viktor Kovalenko (November 12, 2015).
[383] Andrew Kramer and David Herszenhorn, "Ukrainian Soldiers' Retreat From Eastern Town Raises Doubt for Truce," *The New York Times* (February 18, 2015), http://www.nytimes.com/2015/02/19/world/europe/ukraine-conflict-debaltseve.html (accessed August 28, 2016).
[384] Julian Röpcke, Twitter Post (February 10, 2016, 5:21 AM), https://twitter.com/JulianRoepcke/status/565138456893202432 (accessed August 21, 2016).

return to the line of control demarcated by the Minsk protocol.[385] The operation was successful and the Ukrainian forces broke through separatist lines and overran several villages.[386] They were halted at Sakhanka, seven kilometers northeast of Shyrokyne, after intense artillery and Grad rocket fire.[387] Taking casualties, the Azov forces and others fell back to Shyrokyne, where they dug in.

Despite Russia's increased direct involvement in the conflict, European energies continued to be devoted to restoring the Minsk agreement. Following a 16-hour negotiating session, all sides agreed to a final document, nicknamed "Minsk II." This deal, referred to as the Steinmeier formula after the German foreign minister, was a loss in two ways for the West and Ukraine. First, in its substance, it critically sequenced the two elements Russia wanted (local elections and a special status for Donbas) after what Ukraine wanted (control of its border). Minsk I had envisioned these happening simultaneously, or at least was not prejudicial to sequence. Because the first two points were vague, and much more ambiguous than the last point, Russia would be able to prolong its presence in Donbas indefinitely by claiming sufficient autonomy or elections had not yet been met. Doing so would not violate the agreement.

But even in process Minsk II was a problem because it critically diluted growing Western opposition to Russia's increased involvement in Ukraine at a time when Russia was creating more and more facts on the ground – which by

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[385] Julian Röpcke, Twitter Post (February 10, 2016, 5:09 AM), https://twitter.com/JulianRoepcke/status/565135500944900096 (accessed August 21, 2016).
[386] "Ukraine conflict: Battles rage ahead of Minsk talks," *BBC News* (February 10, 2015), http://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-31357588 (accessed August 23, 2016).
[387] "Azov Battalion spearheads Ukrainian counter-offensive," *Kyiv Post* (February 10, 2015), http://www.kyivpost.com/content/kyiv-post-plus/azov-battalion-spearheads-ukrainian-counter-offensive-380136.html (accessed August 24, 2015).

extension made its position stronger and the West's weaker. Debaltseve was the area most in jeopardy; during negotiations with Hollande and Merkel, Putin had insisted that the Ukrainian forces in Debaltseve were surrounded. Thus, under a ceasefire, the city itself would fall under control of the separatists. The day after the ceasefire was signed, the rebels began their final push, determined to cut off the last land route into Debaltseve. A crushing artillery- and armor-backed assault pushed supporting Ukrainian troops back to the northwest of the pocket, preventing the reinforcement of their comrades. "The Russian military," the State Department somewhat plaintively noted, "has deployed a large amount of artillery and multiple rocket launcher systems around Debaltseve, where it is shelling Ukrainian positions. We are confident that these are Russian military, not separatist systems."[388] The Ukrainians claimed that the separatists had grouped about 15,000-17,000 troops around Debaltseve, of which 80 percent were Russian.[389]

However, no new sanctions or US counter-pressure was applied. The new accord had an immediate soporific effect on American actions against Russia. The White House used its mildest language since mid-January about the spike in fighting around Debaltseve, saying only that it was "inconsistent with the spirit of the accord."[390] Gone too were any further mentions of sanctions on Russia:

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[388] Andrew Kramer and Michael Gordon, "U.S. Faults Russia as Combat Spikes in East Ukraine," *The New York Times* (February 13, 2015), http://www.nytimes.com/2015/02/14/world/europe/ukraine-fighting-escalates-ahead-of-truce.html (accessed August 25, 2016).
[389] Viktor Kovalenko, "Debaltseve Diary 9: Separatists' Ultimatum by Radio," *Viktor Kovalenko's Blog* (May 10, 2015), https://viktorkovalenko.wordpress.com/2015/05/10/debaltseve-diary-part-9-separatists-ultimatum-by-radio/ (accessed August 28, 2016).
[390] The White House, "Statement by the Press Secretary on Ukraine" (February 12, 2015), https://obamawhitehouse.archives.gov/the-press-office/2015/02/12/statement-press-secretary-ukraine (accessed March 14, 2020).

officials even acknowledged the ongoing "land grab" but said only that it undercut the ceasefire.[391] Rather, the US State Department announced it was monitoring the situation, and urged respect for Minsk.[392] President Obama telephoned his Ukrainian counterpart Poroshenko to stress his "deep concern" about the ongoing violence around Debaltseve, but promised nothing.[393] On the night of February 16-17, separatist forces captured two Ukrainian company-level defensive positions on its eastern outskirts, opening up the city center. Ukrainian field commanders then made the decision to withdraw in the afternoon of the next day.[394]

By contrast, Putin himself was directly involved with the battlefield outcome. He urged Kiev to allow its forces at Debaltseve to surrender; barring that, he said, "If they aren't capable," then he hoped "they won't prosecute people who want to save their lives and the lives of others."[395] On the night of February 17, Ukrainian forces combined into a column of about 2,000 men just north of the city and then struck out on a northerly looping route only hazily scouted earlier. It was a hellish 25-kilometer journey: at night, under tank, artillery, and small arms fire, with limited mechanization in heavy snow. Their column arrived at the

[391] U.S. Department of State, "Background Briefing on Ukraine" (February 12, 2015), https://2009-2017.state.gov/r/pa/prs/ps/2015/02/237462.htm (accessed March 5, 2020).
[392] U.S. Department of State, "Cease-fire Violations in Ukraine" (February 16, 2015), https://2009-2017.state.gov/r/pa/prs/ps/2015/02/237525.htm (accessed October 29, 2017).
[393] The White House, "Readout of the President's Call with President Petro Poroshenko of Ukraine" (February 14, 2015), https://obamawhitehouse.archives.gov/the-press-office/2015/02/14/readout-presidents-call-president-petro-poroshenko-ukraine (accessed February 28, 2020).
[394] Viktor Kovalenko, "Debaltseve Diary 10: We're Leaving," *Viktor Kovalenko's Blog* (May 10, 2015), https://viktorkovalenko.wordpress.com/2015/05/10/debaltseve-diary-part-10-the-start-of-our-withdrawal/ (accessed August 28, 2016).
[395] Anton Zverev and Vladimir Soldatkin, "Putin tells Kiev to let troops surrender as Ukraine ceasefire unravels," *Reuters* (February 17, 2015), http://www.reuters.com/article/us-ukraine-crisis-idUSKBN0LL0OM20150218 (accessed August 29, 2016).

Ukrainian-held town of Artemivsk on February 18 with, Poroshenko estimated, 80 percent of its soldiers.[396]

With Debaltseve fallen and the line shored up, Moscow seemed content to allow the cease-fire to take hold in most places. The rebels also agreed to the cease-fire terms regarding the withdrawal of heavy weapons from the front line. However, they continued to contest Ukrainian positions on the eastern approaches to Mariupol, where separatist forces began their counterattack a day after Minsk II was signed.[397] They advanced to the eastern fringe of Shyrokyne, pushing the Ukrainian forces to the ridgeline west of the city center.[398] Russian special operations forces were allegedly mixed in with the rebels.[399] A renewed effort came on February 23, which reportedly involved Russian surveillance aircraft. Pavlopil and its outlying areas fell, as well as Kominternove, an important village along a major north-south road between Donetsk and Mariupol.[400] These clashes would continue into March. In total, Ukrainian forces after the agreement lost

[396] Andrew Kramer and David Herszenhorn, "Ukrainian Soldiers' Retreat From Eastern Town Raises Doubt for Truce," *The New York Times* (February 18, 2015), http://www.nytimes.com/2015/02/19/world/europe/ukraine-conflict-debaltseve.html (accessed August 19, 2016).
[397] "Ukraine, pro-Russia rebels swap dozens of prisoners," *Reuters* (February 22, 2015), http://www.reuters.com/-article/us-ukraine-crisis-prisoners-idUSKBN0LQ05A20150222 (accessed August 19, 2016).
[398] "Silent advances – the Russian offensive towards Mariupol already began," *Conflict Report (blog)* (February 25, 2015), https://conflictreport.info/2015/02/25/ (accessed August 26, 2016).
[399] Natalia Zinets and Anton Zverev, "Pro-Russia rebel build-up near port city alarms Ukraine military," *Reuters* (February 21, 2015) http://www.reuters.com/article/us-ukraine-crisis-mariupol-idUSKBN0LP0HN20150221 (accessed August 28, 2016).
[400] "Ukraine Rebels Withdraw From Front-Line Villages Near Mariupol," *Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty* (July 3, 2015), http://www.rferl.org/content/ukraine-rebels-withdraw-shyrokyne/27108640.html (accessed September 3, 2016).

about 70 percent of the territory in the south that its Azov militia volunteers had captured.[401]

Brushfires, April 2015-August 2016

US strategic support to Ukraine did eventually come, but not until the ceasefire took hold. Russia's increased support to the separatists, particularly the widespread use of Russian troops in combat, helped incite the strongest US strategic response to date. President Obama sent $75 million in non-lethal military aid to Kiev in March 2015, up from the $53 million he had sent in September 2014 after the Russian offensive at Ilovaisk. In a Congressional hearing on March 4, US Assistant Secretary of State Victoria Nuland condemned Russia and its puppets' "unspeakable violence and pillage," calling the war "a manufactured conflict – controlled by the Kremlin; fueled by Russian tanks and heavy weapons; financed at Russian taxpayers' expense and costing the lives of young Russians."[402] On April 17, 2015, the first US military forces arrived in the country, 300 soldiers from the 173rd Airborne Brigade, who were tasked with training three battalions of Ukraine's National Guard and volunteer militias.[403] Europe also eventually took a stronger stand against Russian aggression after the second offensive. At the European Council in March, member states agreed to link sanctions to Russia's full implementation of the Minsk protocol. They

[401] "Silent advances – the Russian offensive towards Mariupol already began," *Conflict Report (blog)* (February 25, 2015), https://conflictreport.info/2015/02/25/ (accessed August 26, 2016).
[402] U.S. Department of State, "Testimony on Ukraine Before the House Foreign Affairs Committee" (March 4, 2015), https://2009-2017.state.gov/p/eur/rls/rm/2015/mar/238147.htm (accessed March 6, 2020).
[403] Andrew Roth, "U.S. Army Trainers Arrive in Ukraine" *The New York Times* (April 17, 2015), http://www.nytimes.com/2015/04/18/world/europe/us-army-trainers-arrive-in-ukraine.html (accessed August 31, 2016).

included visa bans and asset freezes for 149 individuals and 37 entities, a prohibition on investment in Crimea, a moderately comprehensive arms embargo, and limitations on debt financing for some large Russian companies. In June, those sanctions were extended for another six months, and would continue to be so in the future.[404]

Russia reined in its proxies in the summer of 2015, likely both because it had achieved its goals and to mitigate further US and European pressure. The separatists also assumed a more defensive posture. On May 20, in a surprising policy shift, the rebel leadership publicly walked back its earlier ambitions for a larger area, saying: "The Novorussiya project is frozen until a new political elite emerges in all these [additional] regions that will be able to head the movement. We don't have the right to impose our opinion on Kharkiv, Zaporizhia, and Odessa."[405] Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov pushed this softer line further, saying that he wanted the separatists' areas to "become part of Ukraine."[406] This was a comedown from the separatists' earlier proclaimed goals, and brought them in line with Russia's more conservative aims. The shift came shortly after Putin's meetings with Merkel on May 10 and Secretary Kerry on May 12. In fact, neither an independent eastern Ukraine nor an annexed new member republic was ideal for Russia. Both would strengthen precisely the

[404] Council of the European Union, "Factsheet: EU restrictive measures" (April 29, 2014), http://www.consilium.europa.eu/uedocs/cms_data/docs/pressdata/EN/foraff/135804.pdf (accessed September 6, 2016).
[405] Ivan Nechepurenko, "Death of Novorossia: Why Kremlin Abandoned Ukraine Separatist Project," *The Moscow Times* (May 25, 2015), https://themoscowtimes.com/articles/death-of-novorossia-why-kremlin-abandoned-ukraine-separatist-project-46849 (accessed September 2, 2016).
[406] "Lavrov: Self-proclaimed republics in Donbas should remain in Ukraine," *Unian Information Agency* (May 20, 2015), http://www.unian.info/politics/1079895-lavrov-self-proclaimed-republics-in-donbas-should-remain-in-ukraine.html (accessed September 2, 2016).

territorial boundaries that would make it more costly to exert military pressure against Ukraine. If Donbas remained in Ukraine but with a separate status, its political status would be hazier. Violations of its borders and de facto interstate aggression would thus be less clear, allowing Moscow to dominate not just eastern Ukraine but, through the threat of force, broader Ukrainian policy as well. Such violations and pressure would be more difficult to balance against, and increase the deniability of Russian troops operating in Ukraine, the same as Georgia.

Fighting flickered through the summer with varying intensity but no major offensives. However, it still had a strategic effect: it normalized a level of violence that Russia could use later on to denude consequences for using military force. The advanced weaponry that Russia had sent the separatists featured prominently. On April 12, heavy shelling broke out along the line of control in the south, near Shyrokyne. Ukrainian forces near the Donetsk airport also came under heavy artillery and infantry attack.[407] On June 3, rebel forces attacked Maryinka, one of the main road junctions into Donetsk, using artillery, rockets, and tanks.[408] After an advance to the center of town, they were eventually pushed back by Ukrainian troops who regained control of the village at the cost of four dead soldiers.[409] Some of these military initiatives also came from the Ukrainian

[407] Hugo Spaulding, "Ukraine Crisis Update: April 16, 2015," *Institute for the Study of War* ((April 16, 2015), http://understandingwar.org/sites/default/files/Ukraine%20SITREP%204-16-15.pdf (accessed September 14, 2016).
[408] Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe, "Spot report by the OSCE Special Monitoring Mission to Ukraine (SMM), 3 June 2015: Fighting around Marinka" (June 4, 2015), http://www.osce.org/ukraine-smm/162116 (accessed September 4, 2016).
[409] "Five Ukrainian soldiers killed, 39 injured in Donbas on June 3 – presidential advisor," *Interfax-Ukraine* (June 4, 2015), http://en.interfax.com.ua/news/general/269741.html (accessed September 5, 2016).

side. In a separate action, Ukrainian forces attempted to seize the town of Zhabunki, northwest of Donetsk city. They advanced about a kilometer but then got bogged down, with each side using heavy weapons including tanks banned by both Minsk agreements.[410]

In the wake of the June fighting, Ukrainian President Poroshenko angrily denounced the 9,000 troops Russia allegedly maintained in the east and called on them to withdraw.[411] NATO Secretary-General Jens Stoltenberg backed him up, saying "We have precise information that Russia is present in eastern Ukraine and that it has delivered large quantities of heavy, advanced weapons to the separatists."[412] President Obama called Poroshenko to express "deep concern" about the participation of Russian forces in the Donetsk assault.[413] Ukraine's ambassador to the EU called on the bloc to impose additional sanctions on Moscow. It did not – no clear additional boundary had been transgressed, and despite the local offensive Russia's proxies had conducted no broader push. No additional major rounds of US sanctions related to the Ukraine crisis were imposed, nor sectoral sanctions applied.

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[410] Organization for Security and Co-Operation in Europe, "Spot report by OSCE Special Monitoring Mission to Ukraine (SMM): Renewed intensive fighting around Donetsk city and Shyrokyne, 12 April 2015" (April 12, 2015), http://www.osce.org/ukraine-smm/150696 (accessed September 1, 2016); Organization for Security and Co-Operation in Europe, "Latest from OSCE Special Monitoring Mission to Ukraine (SMM), based on information received as of 19:30 (Kyiv time), 13 April 2015" (April 14, 2015), http://www.osce.org/ukraine-smm/150811 (accessed September 1, 2016).

[411] "Poroshenko says over 9,000 Russian soldiers are in Ukraine," *Kyiv Post* (June 4, 2016), http://www.kyivpost.com/article/content/ukraine/poroshenko-says-over-9000-russian-servicemen-operate-within-14-tactical-groups-in-ukraine-390229.html (accessed September 5, 2016).

[412] "Ukraine president fears 'full-scale invasion' by Russia," *Al Jazeera* (June 4, 2015), http://www.aljazeera.com/news/2015/06/ukraine-president-fears-full-scale-invasion-russia-150604125234960.html (accessed September 6, 2016).

[413] The White House, "Readout of the President's Call with President Petro Poroshenko of Ukraine" (June 5, 2015), https://obamawhitehouse.archives.gov/the-press-office/2015/06/05/readout-presidents-call-president-poroshenko-ukraine (accessed March 3, 2020).

Without significant additional external pressure on Russia, Poroshenko moved forward within the Minsk II parameters. His allies in parliament gave preliminary approval to a draft bill in August that would give more power to regional authorities as part of Ukraine's commitments. However, per the sequencing issue agreed to in February, Russia would remain in control of the border during this period. This meant its forces could also remain in the east and its military links to the separatists would be unhindered without technically violating the agreement. And the demands were always just out of reach. The Kremlin wanted a specific mention of the Donbas region in Ukraine's constitution, and urged that all legal issues be negotiated directly with the separatists. Putin elaborated these points in a later address on September 4.[414] His Foreign Minister Lavrov reiterated that the special status of Donbas must be entered separately into Ukraine's constitution.[415] The ground that Poroshenko had already given was unpopular; it was met domestically by opposition from his rival Yulia Tymoshenko and violent protests by nationalists that wounded 130 people and killed two.[416] However, with few options, he continued to push ahead and try and give Putin something, enough to pull his troops out of the east.

[414] Vladimir Socor, "Russia Spurns Ukrainian Offer of Constitutional Status for Donetsk-Luhansk," *Eurasia Daily Monitor/Jamestown Foundation*, Vol. 12, 159 (September 4, 2015), http://www.jamestown.org/single/?tx_ttnews%5Btt_news%5D=44339&tx_ttnews%5BbackPid%5D=7#.V8SDrWUqbFI (accessed September 12, 2016).
[415] Vladimir Socor, "Russia Spurns Ukrainian Offer of Constitutional Status for Donetsk-Luhansk," *Eurasia Daily Monitor/Jamestown Foundation*, Vol. 12, 159 (September 4, 2015), http://www.jamestown.org/single/?tx_ttnews%5Btt_news%5D=44339&tx_ttnews%5BbackPid%5D=7#.V8SDrWUqbFI (accessed September 2, 2016).
[416] Andrew Kramer, "2 More Officers Die in Violent Protest Over Autonomy for East Ukraine," *The New York Times* (August 31, 2015), http://www.nytimes.com/2015/09/01/world/europe/ukraine-donetsk-luhansk-protests.html?_r=0 (accessed September 10, 2016).

And there the conflict largely calcified. There was still violence – for example, some 15,000 cease-fire violations alone in February 2016 – but no more strategic offensives by either side.[417] The so-called Normandy Format group (Ukraine, Russia, France, and Germany) that negotiated Minsk II in February would meet six months later in October 2015 and then the year after that, in October 2016. No significant results, and "no miracles," in the words of Chancellor Merkel, followed. It would not convene again for three more years.

III. Conclusion and Analysis

So this was the key strategic judgment on Russia's Ukraine war: in the first phase of fighting, the cost was worth it. All of the goals for which Russia had intervened were achieved in 2014. In the second phase it was not: all that was achieved was incurring additional strategic costs for operational, even tactical, gains. This correlated with the different modes of proxy support and control in each fight: more deniable in the first conflict, with basically defensive aims and textbook hybrid warfare, and less deniable in the second, with more offensive goals and something closer to a conventional fight.

Russia secured the use of the Crimean naval base and Crimea for at least the medium term, created a simmering conflict to keep pressure on Kiev, and retained a buffer state on its border. It probably also frightened NATO allies into hardening their opposition to Ukraine's NATO accession, though practically that

[417] U.S. Department of State, "Ukraine Reforms Two Years After the Maidan Revolution and the Russian Invasion: Testimony before the Senate Foreign Affairs Committee," (March 15, 2016), https://2009-2017.state.gov/p/eur/rls/rm/2016/mar/254707.htm (accessed March 1, 2020).

had been dead since the Georgia war in 2008. Russia did not wholly achieve the codified right to use force in the east, but the Minsk protocol's Steinmeier formula meant that it could sustain troops in the country without clearly violating the agreement for the indefinite future. And like Saakashvili's successor in Georgia, the Poroshenko and Zelensky presidential administrations that followed the war were more amenable to Putin than was the government in 2014.

But those gains came with a cost. Russia was placed again under Soviet-era sectoral sanctions and its debt fell to near-junk status. Its currency crashed, with the ruble's value falling by half. It was kicked out of the G-8. Russian intervention accelerated the trajectory of the Kiev government to ally with the West and join Western institutions, probably eschewing forever Kiev's interest in a Finland-like neutralization. And perhaps most importantly, Russia incurred significant military balancing.  forces were sent to Ukraine to help train Kiev's military, a near-total reversal of the Obama Administration's Russia policy. The deployment of American soldiers to a borderline combat mission in Moscow's backyard would have been unthinkable during Obama's first term, when he had prioritized cooperation with Russia and ridiculed more hawkish Republicans. NATO followed the Americans' lead. At the NATO's Leaders meeting at Warsaw in June 2016, the allies approved the landmark Enhanced Forward Presence, an agreement which based combined Western battlegroups in the Baltic States and Poland. These multinational battalion-sized elements under the framework nations of the US, UK, Germany, and Canada codified the 2014

Wales summit commitment to create precisely what Russia had sought to avoid: more Western military power in the east, on its border.

For their part, Russia's proxies survived but did not prosper. Many separatist leaders like Strelkov had hoped for an annexation to the Russian Federation similar to Crimea's, which never came. Others like Zakharchenko had hoped for formal independence over an even wider swath of territory. Public polling indicated that the population of Donbas felt far more favorable about independence than about joining Russia.[418] But neither materialized. Instead the rebels were left with a still-undefined status within Ukraine. This suited Russia fine, since it blurred Ukraine's lines of sovereignty per the Minsk agreements gave Moscow justification for a military presence in the future. But it was far from what its proxies sought. The irony is that the use of Russian forces in the east to create a more sustainable separatist enclave isolated it instead. The cause of ethnic self-determination, which initially helped delay the West's response to the Donbas crisis, was increasingly blurred by the presence of Russian military forces, making the separatists appear more and more as tools of Russia. Moreover, at key junctures like September 2014 Russia had no compunction about reigning in the separatists' goals and forcing them to align with its own. Because of its close control over the separatists' leadership and its own support, it could do so relatively easily.

In terms of assessing the effect of deniability, this case faced the same challenges as did the Georgia case. How much consequence – how much

[418] Toal, 268-269.

balancing – was due to this issue of deniability and how much to other factors? There were certainly other strategic elements that inhibited a loud and proud Western reaction to Russian policy. Perhaps the most important of these was the mantra repeated by Obama, Kerry, and others that they did not want to get pulled into an east-west Cold War-style confrontation with Russia. It would be too zero-sum, seemed anachronistic, and most practically would obviate the diplomatic off-ramps they were offering to the Russians. The White House seemed fixated on these off-ramps, as if Russia had stumbled into a conflict and was trying to recover with good grace. This could be seen in policies such as the "scalpel sanctions," as Kerry proudly called the Western sanctions, which were designed to target the most minimal parts of the Russian state economy and Moscow's decision-making apparatus. The Obama Administration also wanted European states to take the lead on diplomacy, to further help avoid the Cold War overtones and to keep Europe united diplomatically.[419] This further slowed consequences for Russian aggression, both by essentially requiring consensus with the European Union on sanctions and, with Europe's usually-less-pugnacious approach to conflict, probably taking the teeth out of any response. American recalcitrance went deeper, however. Russian's invasion of Ukraine struck at the entire worldview of the Obama Administration, which had dispensed with the ugliness of great power politics in favor of win-win efforts to address global 21st-century threats like violent extremism and combating climate change. The Obama team was recognizably reluctant to play those great power politics when they came

[419] Kerry, 436-437.

roaring back. And indeed, the Administration's hopes for a "reset" with Russia, by the start of the conflict, had not totally died: witness, for example, Obama's sotto voce comment to Medvedev in 2012 that he would have more flexibility after the election.

This basic strategic mindset was the starting point for the West's approach to the Ukraine crisis. As in the previous case, the best way to control for these issues was to examine when Western changes in language and triggers for the sanctions actually came and when they did not. It was helpful that Russia's proxy strategy was marked by a high degree of variability, with different levels of state involvement at different points. This was useful in tracing out correlations. The balancing Russia incurred when its proxy support grew more brazen was disproportionately greater and came faster. The critical points that shifted US and EU policy against Russia came in four tranches. First, after the Crimean declaration of independence and annexation to Russia. Second, after the downing of flight MH17. Third, after the Russian military's intervention at Ilovaisk. And fourth, most critically, during the concentrated push by Russia's military and proxies at Mariupol and Debaltseve in late January and early February. These were the occasions when Russia involved its own troops in combat or its advanced weapons were used by separatists. In all of these cases, the high visibility of Russia's direct support to its proxies reduced its deniability significantly.

Operationally, this often proved effective, but such shifts incurred strategic costs. Whether those costs were worth it depended on the strategic goal

sought. For example, when Ukraine's counteroffensive began rolling in June 2014, the looser control and lower support Russia had been providing the separatists was insufficient militarily to hold ground. This appears to have surprised the Kremlin. And so in July Russia made political changes and increased the amount of weapons flowing to the rebels, including anti-aircraft weapons, which helped incited the MH17 disaster. Those weapons – that model of proxy war – were not enough to successfully defend the rump state in the east. Kiev's offensive continued almost to the point of victory, when Russia changed its proxy style yet again and involved its own troops in direct combat, first through cross-border shelling and then directly at Ilovaisk. This intervention was crushing and effective operationally, saving Donetsk from being cut off. Russia was heavily punished for that intervention with expanded sectoral sanctions, though it was worth the consequences strategically. Russian intervention prevented the separatists from being overrun and thus retained the enclaves as leverage over a pro-Western Ukraine.

Likewise, there were moments when objectively, given the combat situation on the ground, there should have been more balancing but was not. Those were points when Russia achieved an effective degree of deniability that helped delay or obviate counterpressure. These periods were most obviously April 2014 and November 2014 to mid-January 2015. By the end of Crimean crisis, the United States and European Union were politically mobilized against Russia, particularly after Moscow made unilateral changes to Crimea's sovereignty. Like in Georgia, political changes had no deniability. Swaths of

sanctions were levied. But then Western reactions reset to almost a baseline level mere days later when the fighting in Donbas started, even though no reasonable observer would deny that the same Russian hand that had invaded Crimea was involved in Donetsk. Kerry's comments on April 17 were unbelievable, in retrospect. It took a month before the United States again acted against Russia and its proxies. And these proxies had considerable success seizing territory in the meantime. Similarly, later in the fall, the creeping escalation of combat along the line of separation became less creeping in November and blatant in December. Senior NATO officials were banging the drum about the increased violence, with little response from Washington or Brussels (or Berlin). It took a major, multi-pronged offensive for the West to be spurred into action.

How did deniability work in these instances? First, Russia's different style of proxy war in the east obviously helped cloud the intelligence. It was not always clear what exactly was happening tactically on the ground, both in April 2014 and in certain hotspots during the second phase of conflict (though elements closer to the action like NATO obviously had an idea of the operational picture). After the annexation of Crimea, Russia preferred to fight with additional distance between the state and its proxies, and was rewarded for doing so by incurring objectively less damaging sanctions until July and then especially August 2014. Much of the fighting looked like either civil unrest or tactical ceasefire violations per Kerry's description of communal violence, even if strategically it was clear that the Russians probably were responsible. And it was not just an American tactical picture but a European one. Per its diplomatic strategy the US had to wait

on European initiative and consensus before moving forward, which was frustrating.[420]

But the deniability of Russia's proxy warfare also allowed both the US and the Europeans to take Russian claims at face value in order to manage escalation of the conflict. In the winter of 2014, NATO officials were sounding the alarm about ceasefire violations. They knew what was happening on the ground. They also knew that in the days before and after Minsk II, the Russians were not complying and the separatists were still moving. But they held back, even dropping Kerry's February 4 threat to arm the Ukrainians. This was ostensibly because the US did not want to escalate the conflict into a Cold War-type standoff and give diplomacy a chance. But that impulse in itself was telling. The US was responding in a way that suggested Russia's proxy war in eastern Ukraine was something less than conventional aggression. The Steinmeier formula at Minsk II, which was the sum of the West's efforts, encapsulated this issue. Steinmeier centered the Ukraine crisis on Ukraine's domestic constitution, which had the effect of treating the crisis as legitimate and not wholly manufactured, despite knowledge of the intelligence. It took at face value Russia's view that the Ukraine war was an intrastate, rather than an interstate one, and treated its deniability at something like face value, and to solve it suggested intrastate solutions.

Russian strategic shifts are not the only causal factor, of course. The stiffening of the US and European battlefield responses in late January 2015 also

[420] Kerry, 437.

suggest another difference between the second period of fighting and the first. The second period was clearly an offensive by the separatists with direct Russian support; it looked something less like Russia's doctrine of hybrid war and something more like a conventional war. Russia's supply of weapons to the separatists was met with a slower response during the first period of fighting, with the exception of when MH-17 was shot down. But purely in the Ukraine-separatist dynamic from June to August, Russia mostly delayed the consequences for its extension of military supplies to the rebels. On the other hand, Kerry and other Western officials spoke out strongly and consistently against Russia once the breadth of the separatists' offensive in 2015 became clear, a reaction which was diluted only by the Minsk diplomatic efforts. This suggested that the strategic posture of the fighting force mattered for incurring balancing.

There were other elements that affected Western reactions. It was interesting that the initial change in regime in Ukraine seems to have altered the basic formula of Ukraine's sovereignty. The flight of Viktor Yanukovych in February and the pro-Western orientation of the new government seemed to reduce the sovereign legitimacy of the central government as such despite Western statements about Ukraine's territorial integrity. Almost immediately following Crimea, when the Donbas fighting broke out, US and EU statements began to call for altered (or recognized) political status for ethnically Russian areas in the east. Even in Crimea, Russia was only punished after it annexed the area, not when its troops arrived. Likewise, though Strelkov and other separatist leaders had obvious ties to Russia, the political changeover in Kiev was

unconventional and abrupt enough to lend some credibility to their claims of ethnic representation and legitimacy – and thus deniability – to their Russian military support. The presence of ethnic Russians was thus adopted by all sides – by Russia and to a striking degree by the West – as an additional barometer of legitimacy for governments that wanted to have troops on the ground, whether Kiev or Moscow.

Russia's power projection was also aided by the negotiation of both Minsk protocols. Minsk was a classic example of how diplomatic agreements could aid proxy warfare by codifying a blurring of sovereignty. Critically, Russia secured wording denoting a "special regime" for the Donetsk and Luhansk regions, which could reduce Kiev's sovereignty in the east and legitimize a continued military presence until vague conditions had been met. The same concept had been used to justify Russia's extended military footprint in South Ossetia after the end of the 2008 war; with the precedent set, Russian violations of Ukrainian sovereignty would thereafter incite less balancing. Because Minsk demanded steps by both sides, European pressure would likely increase on Ukraine, rather than Russia, or even Ukraine and Russia evenly. Europe had interests in Russia it did not have in Ukraine, such as gas, and Russia could make life unpleasant for the EU – prodding, poking, testing Europe's security – in ways Ukraine could not. Over time, European pressure would more and more fall on Kiev, the easier target, the one with fewer stakeholders. Minsk II made this explicit. Under the Steinmeier formula, Ukraine would only get the border back after its own reforms had been

fully implemented. In a variety of ways Russia could ensure that they would never be.

The human terrain in the east also likely delayed Western reactions, both by clouding the tactical picture and allowing the West to treat the problem as an ethnic representation issue. The close-quarters proximity of the Ukrainian and Russian communities to the line of control and the fragmentation along each side meant that Russia could sustain a high level of violence – and thus pressure – without having to suffer strategic consequences. After the ceasefire was signed on September 5, the cross-border shooting and territory grabs did not stop. Because there was no logical front line encapsulating the Russian versus Ukrainian community, the front line fell to wherever troops were standing at that moment. And with the acknowledgement of ethnic representation as at least tacitly a *causus belli*, drawing clear lines against separatist violence was harder. The onus of aggression was particularly murky because in places like Donetsk, where the line of control cut through facilities like the airport, the different sides were quite literally right on top of each other. They were seizing and losing control of different parts of the airport well before it became apparent to senior leadership in the West powers that a strategic offensive was on the way. Likewise in other civilian-dominated areas, the rebels could sustain a level of violence through shelling of civilian areas that made spikes in the violence – the makings of major operations – harder to identify for outside forces. Thus, while the second period of fighting really began with a significant surge in violence in December, it was not until the broad offensive launched in January that the West reacted.

When this reaction finally came, it ensured that Russia's big push in January and February was a strategic failure. Moscow was truly pawn-grabbing for operational gains. As after Crimea, the United States and EU had ratcheted down their balancing of Russia significantly after the Minsk agreement beginning in October 2014. Despite NATO officials warning of heavy fighting along the line of control and an influx of Russian equipment, US policymakers reverted to relatively sanguine public statements about Russia. When they had to criticize, they criticized the proxies. This changed dramatically in January, however, with the start of the separatists' push for Mariupol and the outlying regions of Donetsk like Debaltseve. These attacks included much more direct Russian involvement. Russian combat forces were reportedly involved in several of these operations and incurred strategic consequences only two weeks after the fighting broke out in earnest. The EU expanded its sectoral sanctions against Russia, and the US threatened military involvement for the first time. These measures were not operationally effective, but they were a prelude to the strategic introduction of US military forces into Ukraine two months later, as well as a major aid package. This was precisely the situation Russia's policy was trying to avoid. And what did Russia get in return? Truly marginal gains around Donetsk city and a failed offensive at Mariupol.

CHAPTER FOUR: IRAN AND HEZBOLLAH, 2005-2016

Iran's relationship with Hezbollah in Lebanon has been the gold standard of modern proxy warfare for nearly four decades. The support Iran has provided helped the group grow from a shadowy kidnapping ring in 1982 to the only Arab fighting force that has defeated the Israeli military. Since its founding at the height of the Lebanese civil war, Hezbollah gained control of southern Lebanon, then effective control of the state, and then rescued Iran's junior partner the Assad government during the Syrian civil war. Throughout most of these decades, outside powers – Western Europe, the United States, and Israel – found it difficult to balance against Iran in response.

Iran's patronage of Lebanese politics was not unique to the Shia. Lebanon's diverse population has provided ample opportunity for outside powers to support sectarian proxies. During the Ottoman period, France championed the Maronite Christian community and gave it disproportionate weight in the new government at its independence in 1943. In the 1960's, as French influence faded, an influx of Palestinian refugees upset Lebanon's confessional balance and invited sponsors of their own. When the civil war broke out in 1975, Syria and Israel jousted with each other through Christian, Sunni, and Druze militias. And after its revolution in 1979, Iran used the Shia proxy force Hezbollah to gain primacy over the other factions in the country and dominate Lebanon's strategic orientation.

This chapter focuses on the Iran-Hezbollah relationship from 2005 to 2016. Though Hezbollah's roots go back to 1982, the Hariri assassination in 2005 was when Lebanon's strategic orientation was seriously contested for the first time in the modern era. During Hezbollah's ascent in the Lebanese civil war, the global and regional balance of power was much different, limiting the utility of this case for modern policymakers.

For example, it would be extremely unlikely that Syria would have been pushed out of Lebanon in 2005 if it still had Soviet support. How Iran managed to stay even while Syria left is of great interest here. Second, the Lebanese civil war and the early years of Iran have undergone intensive study. Comparatively, the value for focusing on more modern events is higher than revisiting, once again, the Islamic Revolution and Hezbollah's attacks against Western targets.

The chapter consists of three parts. The first section will review Iran's creation of Hezbollah and the growth of its ideological and material support. Iran's early tactical involvement in Hezbollah operations gave way later to strategic control of the group, which exercised tactical and operational independence. It will also describe the context of that relationship within Lebanon's political status quo leading up to the 2005 assassination of Rafiq Hariri. Second, it will examine how Iran used Hezbollah to achieve its goals, with a focus on four periods. These are the Hariri assassination and aftermath, the July war, the 2008 Lebanese presidential crisis, and the Syrian civil war, particularly the offensive at Qusayr. Third, it will analyze the strategic conclusions from this case. Above all, it will describe how Iran achieved effective deniability despite its close support of Hezbollah. Several factors in Lebanon affected the deniability of this support. The most important of these was the two overlapping wars Hezbollah fought at once: its conflict with Israel as well as its conflict with internal opponents. Hezbollah's war with Israel provided justification for its Iranian support and critically reduced external balancing against that support. Those weapons could then be used internally to guarantee Hezbollah's independent military capability and Lebanon's strategic

orientation. Overall, Iran achieved significant deniability in 2006 and 2012, but experienced more balancing in 2008 and 2013.

I. Origins

As sponsors go, Iran was a latecomer to Lebanon. It was geographically and culturally distant, linked only by the size of its Shia population, and had been without a presence on the Mediterranean since the time of the Sassanids. The Pahlavi Shahs had ignored Lebanon's Shia. Theirs was an ethnic nationalism, and the regime was mostly a status quo supporter of US policy initiatives in the region. After the revolution, however, Iran's geopolitical goals shifted along with its ideology.

The Islamic Republic's political ideology was a revolutionary brand of Shia Islamism that acted as a natural vehicle for a revisionist state. The dominant form of religion in Iran was Twelver or Ismaili Shiism, which posited that political and religious authority stemmed from a line of twelve imams since the death of Mohammed. The twelfth went into occultation as an infant, but at a given time, would return and restore justice to the world.[421] Historically, this tradition helped non-clerical rulers since it removed religious authorities as potential rivals for the crown.[422] That changed as Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini emerged as a key opposition leader against the Shah and defined a governing role for the clergy. In 1971, he published his proposal for clerical

[421] Hassan Mneimneh, "The Arab Reception of Velayet-e-Faqih: The Counter-Model of Mohammed Mahdi Shams al-Din," *Hudson Institute: Current Trends in Islamist Ideology* (May 21, 2009), https://www.hudson.org/research/9847-the-arab-reception-of-vilayat-e-faqih-the-counter-model-of-muhammad-mahdi-shams-al-din (accessed July 20, 2017).
[422] Nikki Keddie and Juan Cole, "Introduction," in *Shiism and Social Protest*, ed. Juan Cole and Nikki Keddie (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1986), 6.

governance, the *vilayet-e faqih*, or governorship of the jurist.[423] This doctrine essentially eliminated the idea of separation of powers by placing political authority in the hands of the clergy, particularly a *faqih* who could interpret God's will into policy decisions on earth.[424] It was a rejection of the clergy's traditional deference to government, and a particular challenge to the legitimacy of avowedly religious regimes in the Middle East and Persian Gulf.[425] There were also strong themes in Shiism of millenarianism and martyrdom that made it the perfect soup for a revolutionary ideology. Acts of repression by the state, be they in Iran or in Lebanon, evoked the martyrdom of Hussein in the seventh century. Demonstrations in the beginning of 1978 fed a cycle of repression, funeral, demonstration, and repression that was effective in eroding the Shah's control.[426] Iran's revolutionary ideology, not for the first time, had grafted itself onto a social practice to enable more effective resistance. In the fall, leftist elements and students instigated a general strike, which was joined and appropriated by the religious resistance to the Shah. He abdicated in January, and days later Khomeini returned to establish a new state.

Khomeini's political ideology was not enough, however, to bridge the gap between competing religious and secular factions when the revolution ended and Iranians attempted to create a government.[427] His movement sat on a stool with three legs: the

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[423] Said Amir Arjomand, "The Pahlavi Era," in *Expectation of the Millennium: Shi'ism in History*, ed. Seyyed Hossein Nasr, Hamid Debashi, and Seyyed Vali Reza Nasr (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1989), 230.
[424] Arjomand, 231.
[425] Hamid Dabashi, "Early Propagation of *Wilayet-i Faqih* and Mulla Ahmad Naraqi," in *Expectation of the Millennium: Shi'ism in History*, ed. Seyyed Hossein Nasr, Hamid Debashi, and Seyyed Vali Reza Nasr (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1989), 288-300.
[426] Jerrold Green, *Revolution in Iran: The politics of countermobilization* (New York: Praeger, 1982), 85.
[427] Said Saffari, "The Legitimization of the Clergy's Right to Rule in the Iranian Constitution of 1979," *British Journal of Middle Eastern Studies*, vol. 20, no. 1 (1993): 67-68.

religious base, secular nationalists, and the leftists. The latter two groups held very different ideas on women's rights, social mores, and constitutional government than the seminarians of Qom.[428] The new constitution codified these divides. Iran's president and parliament were elected by direct ballot and maintained day-to-day control of the state.[429] However, the Constitution also created a twelve-member Council of Guardians, headed by a Supreme Leader, which would review all legislation to ensure that it was compatible with sharia law.[430] In practice, this system stripped the elected parliament of most crucial decision-making abilities, and the Supreme Leader exercised near-dictatorial powers.[431] In addition, the Supreme Leader, not the elected government, controlled the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC) and other key sources of Iranian pressure abroad.

To bridge this divide, conservative elements repeatedly took political advantage of confrontations with external powers, particularly the United States, to unite Iran's factions (or silence them) in the face of more radical leaders and policy. For the first nine months after the revolution in February 1979, Iran had trod cautiously.[432] But then in November 1979, militant Iranian students seized control of the US embassy in Tehran. The crisis was used by hard-liners to consolidate their power: a top-level cleric informed US Secretary of State Cyrus Vance that the US would "not get [its] hostages until

[428] Arzoo Osanloo, *The Politics of Women's Rights in Iran* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2009), 39.
[429] Mohsen Milani, *The Making of Iran's Islamic Revolution: From Monarchy to Islamic Republic* (Boulder: Westview Press, 1994), 174.
[430] William Sullivan, "The New Direction. From the AET to SDW," *Asnad*, vol. 14 (March 1, 1979), 18-19.
[431] Saffari, 69-71.
[432] Fred Halliday, "Iranian Foreign Policy since 1979: Internationalism and Nationalism in the Islamic Revolution," in *Shi'ism and Social Protest*, ed. Juan Cole and Nikki Keddie (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1986), 95.

Khomeini has put all the institutions of the Islamic Revolution into practice."[433] Prime Minister Mehdi Bazargan, a nationalist who had aimed at building a more evenhanded relationship with the United States, resigned in protest.[434] The outbreak of war with Saddam Hussein's Iraq further bolstered the revolutionary wing of the government. Saddam believed that this schism combined with Iran's internal disarray and his support from exiled Iranians would lead to a quick victory.[435] Instead, Iranians rallied behind the regime. The country's socialist president Abdolhassan Bani-Sadr, who was locked in a confrontation with the Council of Guardians, was forced from power. The leftist opposition in Iran was eliminated, and the Iranian parliament was placed securely in the hands of the conservative Islamic Republican Party.[436]

This consolidation of domestic power under Iran's hard-liners led to a formulation of a more confrontational, revisionist foreign policy. Iran became more aggressive internationally: its geopolitical alignment shifted decisively away from both the United States (and even the Soviet Union) to the most rejectionist Arab states.[437] Tehran's radio station described Khomeini as the "leader of the oppressed of the world."[438] By 1982 the Islamic Republic's war aims in Iraq had became near-unconditional, including the annexation of most of its neighbor.[439] This revisionism extended to the Gulf monarchies, which faced an ideological threat from the Iranian Revolution, and of course to Israel. For the decade after its revolution, as the war with Iraq raged, Iran engaged in an intense

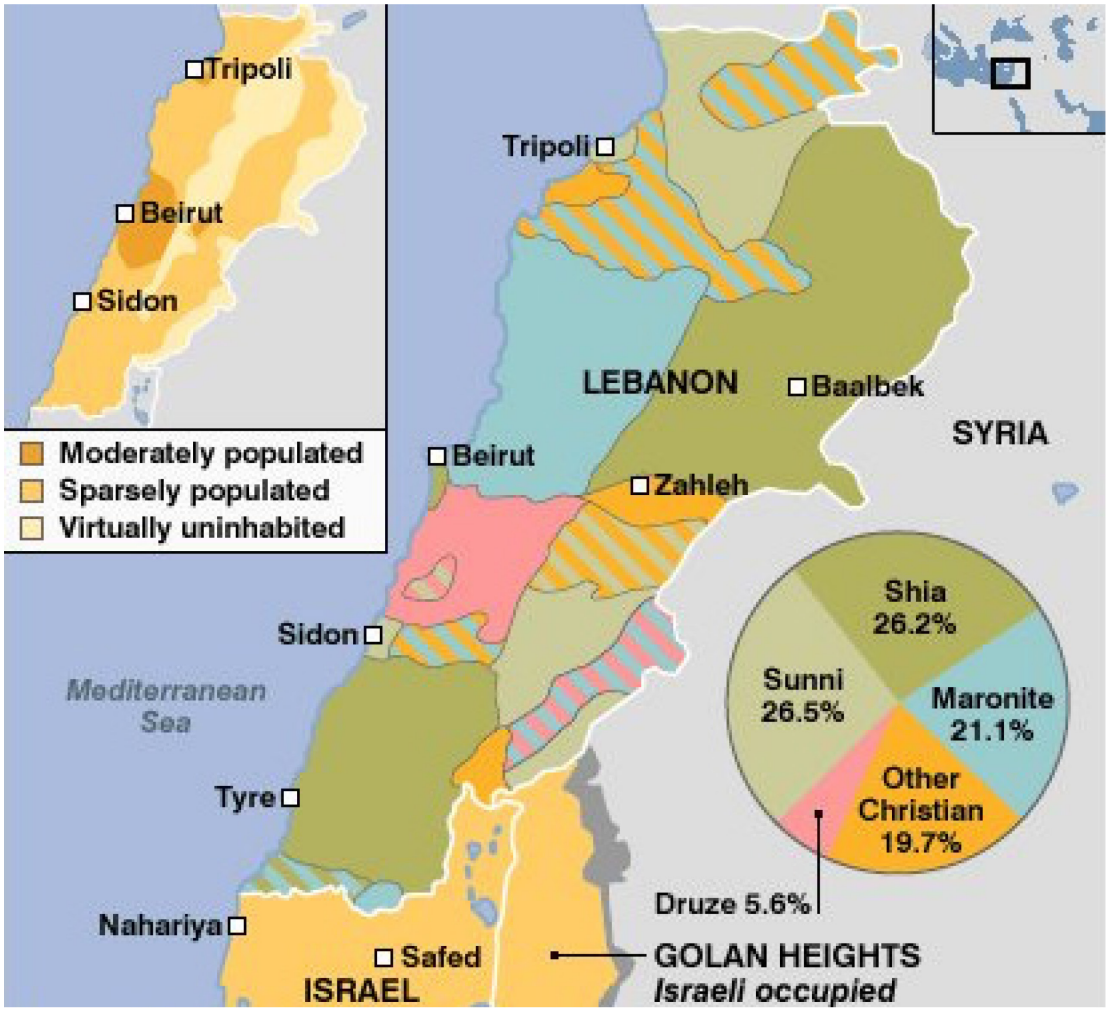
[433] Warren Christopher, *American Hostages in Iran*: *The Conduct of a Crisis* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1985), 44.
[434] Gilles Kepel, *Jihad: The Trail of Political Islam* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2003), 114.
[435] Nita Renfrew, "Who Started the War?" *Foreign Policy*, no. 66 (Spring 1987): 98-108.
[436] Milani, 209.
[437] Halliday, 96.
[438] Halliday, 101.
[439] Hooshang Amirahmadi, *Revolution and Economic Transition*. (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1990), 53.

struggle for dominance with these powers. The use of revolutionary proxy groups, often but not only from Shia populations, was an integral and familiar part of Iranian efforts in this competition. In its earliest days, the Islamic Republic had hosted a world conference of liberation organizations. These ranged from Shia militants and the Dawa party in Iraq to Sunni Palestinian radicals in the Palestinian territories and Hazaras in Afghanistan.[440]

But it was in Lebanon that Iranian proxy warfare would make its modern stamp. During this period the Lebanese Shia were experiencing their own political awakening. They were the poorest of Lebanon's three major communities, a penury exacerbated by tremendous demographic growth and dominated by a few powerful families with a long-standing monopoly on public life. An Iraqi cleric, Musa al-Sadr, arrived in Lebanon a decade earlier as part of a broader Shia exodus from Iraq's new Baathist regime and its repression of clerics and seminaries. Sadr created a new political standard for the Shia called *Harakat al-Mahrumin*, which armed itself and became the militia Amal with the outbreak of the Lebanese civil war.[441] Having helped shape the Shia into an armed political force, Sadr disappeared in 1978 on a trip to Libya. His absence created a political vacuum that was filled by more militant clerics like Mohammed Fadlallah as well as an ideological vacuum. Sadr's Amal had not been particularly religious or revolutionary.[442] Khomeini's brand of Shia militancy was. In the context of Lebanon's civil war, Khomeini's ideology was attractive to many not just for its religious ideology, but also, like in Iran, its stridently anti-Western and anti-Israel rhetoric. After Israel's

[440] Halliday, 103; Chehabi and Mneimneh, 35.
[441] Norton (1987), 61-63.
[442] Norton (1987), 63-64; Theodor Hanf, *Coexistence in Wartime Lebanon: Decline of a State and Rise of a Nation* translated by John Richardson (London: The Centre for Lebanese Studies in association with IB Tauris, 1993), 316-317.

invasion of Lebanon in July 1982, these ideas attracted dissident members of Amal like Hussein al-Musawi and Seyyid Subhi al-Tufayli. They asked for help and Iran's new revolutionary leadership was happy to assist.[443] Several hundred troops from the IRGC were duly sent to Lebanon to train recruits.[444] In late 1982, these IRGC members organized dissident members of Amal and Palestinian groups to form the Lebanese National Resistance, which became Hezbollah.[445]



Source: University of Texas/CIA/Infolobanan

[443] Chehabi, 211-212.
[444] Ahmad Majidyar, "Is Deepening Shiite-Sunni Tension Plunging Lebanon Into a New Civil War?" *American Enterprise Institute for Public Policy Research* (March 2014): 3, https://www.aei.org/wp-content/uploads/2014/03/-is-deepening-sh-iitesunni-tension-plunging-lebanon-into-a-new-civil-war_08112975627.pdf (accessed September 4, 2015).
[445] Houchang Chehabi, "Iran and Lebanon in the Revolutionary Decade," in *Distant Relations: Iran and Lebanon in the last 500 years*, ed. Houchang Chehabi (New York: I.B. Tauris, 2006), 220.

For Iran, Hezbollah was useful as a tool to achieve both its ideological and geopolitical objectives. It fulfilled the religious streak in Iran's ideological makeup, by promising the return of Jerusalem and an export of the revolution. It also degraded Israel, one of Iran's primary regional geopolitical opponents, and humiliated its allies like the United States.[446] A strong proxy further allowed Iran to maintain political control of Lebanon, both during periods when Hezbollah was in government and when it remained an armed spoiler. And for the hardline elements in Iran's leadership, particularly the Revolutionary Guard, Lebanon provided an opportunity to develop its own power base and represented a tangible demonstration of the consolidation of power by revolutionary factions at home.[447]

Iran's new leaders were familiar with Lebanon: indeed some like Mohsen Rafiqdost, the head of the Revolutionary Guard, had trained with PLO guerillas in the Bequa Valley.[448] Iran's ambassadors to Syria and Lebanon in those first years, Ali Akbar Mohtashami and Mohammed Hassan Akhtar, described themselves respectively as Hezbollah's "spiritual father" and "field father."[449] Mohtashami in particular was a key founding supporter of Hezbollah and an ideological advocate of exporting the revolution abroad. Iran's religious ideology was a defining influence on Hezbollah. The party's founding document specifically endorsed the *vilayet-e faqih*. Like Iran, the group had an officially non-sectarian message, calling for the unity of Muslims across the Middle

[446] Chehabi and Mneimneh, 36.
[447] Bayram Sinkaya, *The Revolutionary Guards in Iranian Politics: Elites and Shifting Relations* (New York: Routledge, 2016), 116.
[448] Augustus Norton, *Hezbollah: A Short History* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2009), 32.
[449] Majidyar, 3.

East.[450] It cited "Islamic Iran" as a direct source of emulation and Khomeini as its source of political authority.[451] Even more than in Iran, however, this doctrine was not universally popular among Lebanon's multisectarian population, or even among the Shia clergy themselves.[452] Confrontation with external powers helped Hezbollah to bridge these divides. Hezbollah's charter ascribed to itself the Islamic Republic's division of the world into the oppressed and the oppressors, characterized by the "arrogant powers."[453] These were primarily the Christian Western European states, which Hezbollah believed were banding together with the Soviet Union in constant and historic hostility to Islam.[454]

Hezbollah used attacks against Western and Israeli targets to consolidate power domestically and reduce opposition to its Iranian support. In that sense, Hezbollah's calculated xenophobia was a microcosm of anti-Westernism in Iran. Kidnappings and bombings of Western targets would thus fulfill both Hezbollah's and Iran's strategic and political ends. The most well known early Hezbollah operations were bombings of the US Embassy in April 1983 and the US Marine barracks in Beirut in October, which killed 241 Marines and 58 French paratroopers. In September 1984, Hezbollah stuck the US Embassy in Beirut again, with a vehicle some reported to have an Iranian driver.[455] Kidnappings were also a widespread Hezbollah practice. Under a variety of pseudonyms, Hezbollah was responsible for eighty-seven kidnappings during the 1980's, with the most

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[450] Kenneth Pollack, *The Persian Puzzle: The Conflict Between Iran and America* (New York: Random House, 2004), 201.
[451] Matthew Levitt, *Hezbollah: the Global Footprint of Lebanon's Party of God* (Washington, DC: Georgetown University Press, 2013), 34.
[452] Jamal Sankari, *Fadlallah: The Making of a Radical Shi'ite Leader* (London: Saqi Books, 2005), 172-177.
[453] Augustus Norton, *Amal and the Shia: The Struggle for the Soul of Lebanon, Hezbollah* (Austin, TX: University of Texas Press, 1987), 167-87.
[454] Hala Jaber, *Hezbollah: Born with a Vengeance* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1997), 55.
[455] Levitt, 32.

victims from the United States. Ten hostages died in its custody, including the CIA's Beirut Chief of Station William Buckley.[456] These operations were closely supported by Iran, which considered the group to be a core national interest.[457] For example, one source suggested Iran's ambassador to Lebanon met in April 1983 with the US Embassy suicide bomber before the attack and supplied him with some of the explosives he required.[458] Iranian officials provided some kidnapping operatives diplomatic passports and brought at least one hostage to Iran.[459] Iran also provided training for Hezbollah operatives in Lebanon with its own forces, primarily from the IRGC, conducted at training camps in the Beqaa Valley that all Hezbollah members were required to attend.[460] By 1984, American intelligence operatives estimated that around 800 Revolutionary Guards were present in Lebanon.[461] Iran also provided a wide variety of weaponry to Hezbollah. By the time of the August war, this would include about 10,000 missiles, a capability that sponsors like Russia and Pakistan never provided to their proxies. This was critical because Hezbollah was expected to be the unit of influence. It had to carry all of the fighting by itself, without Iranian tactical support, which trailed off after the early years of the civil war. Because IRGC personnel were not the primary agent of Iran's policy in Lebanon, Hezbollah had to build up its own arsenals, cadres, and operational capabilities.

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[456] Byman, 85.
[457] Levitt, 12.
[458] Christ, 134.
[459] Jaber, 116-120.
[460] Ahmad Majidyar, "Is Deepening Shiite-Sunni Tension Plunging Lebanon Into a New Civil War?" *American Enterprise Institute for Public Policy Research* (March 2014): 3, https://www.aei.org/wp-content/uploads/2014/03/-is-deepening-sh-iitesunni-tension-plunging-lebanon-into-a-new-civil-war_08112975627.pdf, 3.
[461] David Christ, *The Twilight War: the Secret History of America's Thirty-Year Conflict With Iran* (New York: The Penguin Press, 2012), 126.

Though there was a degree of tactical independence among the hostage takers, Hezbollah operations came under the strategic control of Iran and were aimed at achieving Iranian goals.[462] For example, one particular wave of kidnappings and bombings in 1984 was intended as a response to the kidnapping and arrest of 17 militants arrested in Kuwait the year before.[463] This control was further illustrated when Hezbollah's interests clashed with those of Syria later in the war. After the near-total Israeli withdrawal in 1985, Damascus attempted to regain control of state military facilities in the Bekaa Valley in 1986, leading to clashes between Hezbollah and its Sunni proxy the SSNP. Syria also opposed Palestinians being permitted to return to Lebanon and supported Amal's fight to remove them, despite Hezbollah's opposition.[464] When Hezbollah gained the upper hand against Amal in February 1987, Syrian forces reentered West Beirut in response and killed nearly two dozen Hezbollah supporters. Iran then forced Hezbollah to back down, so as not to jeopardize its relations with a key Arab state during its war against Iraq. Another bout of violence between Amal and Hezbollah over the abduction of a US-born UN peacekeeper and the threat of Syrian intervention led to Iran brokering another deal. This, too, was mostly in Syria's favor, allowing Syrian troops to remain in Beirut's southern suburbs.[465]

As the Lebanese civil war progressed, an important feature of Iranian support to Hezbollah became the funding of its social services. Iran provided the bulk of Hezbollah's finances, from $50 million to over $100 million per year.[466] This funding

[462] Levitt, 34.
[463] Levitt, 37.
[464] Augustus Norton, "The Role of Hezbollah in Lebanese Domestic Politics," *The International Spectator*, 42, no. 4 (2007): 477.
[465] Chehabi 227-228.
[466] Daniel Byman, *Deadly Connections: States That Sponsor Terrorism* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 88.

came from Iranian government-funded businesses, such as the Relief Organization, but also directly from the country's religious leadership via its religious tax.[467] Hezbollah also developed non-Iranian sources of funding from outside of Lebanon, from pursuits like smuggling cigarettes.[468] This social work was a key element of the group's support and legitimacy among Lebanon's population.[469] Charitable institutions like the Relief Committee, the Islamic Health Committee, and the Jihad al-Binaa, all backed by Iran, received public accreditation in 1988. The Iran-funded Reconstruction Campaign operated most of Hezbollah's construction projects, provided trash collection, and maintained water reservoir for the public.[470] The Relief Committee built hospitals, conducted social work, and issued student and housing loans, including seed capital for businesses.[471] By the end of the civil war, it was distributing about two million dollars to nearly seven thousand families in Lebanon.[472] It and the Jihad al-Binna had direct ties to their parent companies in Iran, which provided the bulk of their capital, and Iranian officials maintained offices in Lebanon to help administer the funds.[473] By 1989, Iran was financing 90 percent of Hezbollah's sprawling social program, which included three hospitals, seventeen medical clinics, and a vast commercial network of construction companies, supermarkets, gas stations, and other businesses.[474]

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[467] Jaber, 151.
[468] Sari Horwitz, "Cigarette smuggling linked to terrorism," *Washington Post* (June 8, 2004), http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/articles/A23384-2004Jun7-.html (accessed October 3, 2016).
[469] Chehabi, 227.
[470] Houchang Chehabi, "Iran and Lebanon after Khomeini," in *Distant Relations: Iran and Lebanon in the last 500 years*, ed. Houchang Chehabi (New York: I.B. Tauris, 2006), 273.
[471] Jaber, 148-149.
[472] Jaber, 149.
[473] Jaber, 150.
[474] A. Nizar Hamzeh, "Islamism in Lebanon: A Guide," *Middle East Review of International Affairs* 1, no. 3 (Spring 1997), http://almashriq.hiof.no/lebanon/30-0/320/324/324.2/islamism/shia-islam-leb.html (accessed January 3, 2016).

Beginning in 1989, Iran's support for Hezbollah began to decline. Mohsen Rafiqdost, an important Hezbollah supporter, was removed from command of the IRGC in September 1988.[475] Mohtashami was prevented from joining the Council of Experts in 1990 and from running for a parliament seat in 1992 as part of an overall disempowerment of the radical faction.[476] Iran's foreign policy goals had changed. The country was beset by debts from the Iraq war and needed assistance with reconstruction.[477] The Cold War was also ending: the superpowers had united to oppose Saddam Hussein's invasion of Iraq, and revisionist states had much less ability to resist the American-led order. In the face of these constraints the new Iranian president Hashemi Rafsanjani pursued a restrained path for Iran, cutting subsidies for Hezbollah and seeking to improve Iran's relations with the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) and the West.[478]

Despite Iran's reduced support to Hezbollah, it retained a high degree of strategic control. It forced its proxy to swallow several ideological concessions to coincide with its changing geopolitical objectives. First, Iran ended its opposition to Syrian troops remaining in Lebanon after the war and made Hezbollah follow suit, despite its recent clashes with the Syrian army. The Iranian government then dropped its opposition to the Taif settlement in 1990. Hezbollah concurred at its second party congress in April 1991 over the objections of hard-liners like Hassan Nasrallah.[479] Tufayli, with Iran's and Fadlallah's support, secured the party's support for both Taif and making accommodation

[475] Sinkaya, 58.
[476] Jaber, 150; Chehabi, 289.
[477] Shireen Hunter, *Iran's Foreign Policy in the Post-Soviet Era: Resisting the New International Order* (Santa Barbara: Praeger, 2010), 82-87.
[478] Hunter (2010), 197; Chehebi 296-297.
[479] Amal Saad-Ghorayeb, *Hezbu'llah: Politics and Religion* (London: Pluto Press, 2002), 47.

with the other sectarian factions under essentially Amal's vision of majoritarian democratic government.[480] In 1991, a Treaty of Brotherhood, Cooperation, and Coordination was signed between Lebanon and Syria officially permitting Syrian forces to remain under the Taif accord.[481] The United States, desiring Syrian acquiescence to the war against Iraq and the burgeoning peace process, did not press the issue, nor did the Sunni Gulf states.[482] Iran also shut down Hezbollah's practice of kidnapping, though this took longer, over two years.[483]

With the reduction in Iran's support, and its accommodation to some of Taif's political provisions, Hezbollah made a pragmatic decision to contest the 1992 Lebanese parliamentary elections.[484] Important Shia clerics like Fadlallah and Iran's new Supreme Leader Ali Khameini both issued opinions supportive of political action in 1992, and Hezbollah's highest decision-making body the Shura Council concurred.[485] The rationale provided by Nasrallah, who had taken over the Secretary-Generalship of Hezbollah in February 1992, was that participation would increase Hezbollah's resources and support in Lebanon, allow cooperation with other groups, and assist in preserving the legitimacy and efficacy of Hezbollah's fight against Israel.[486] He was right. This decision bolstered Hezbollah's legitimacy by integrating the party, its operations, and its armed exceptionalism into the Lebanese political system. This had the greatest effect not among

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[480] Chehabi, 41, 296-297.
[481] "Treaty of Brotherhood, Cooperation, and Coordination Between the Syrian Arab Republic and the Lebanese Republic," *United Nations Treaty Series* (1992), http://peacemaker.un.org/sites/peacemaker.un.o-rg/files/LB-SY_910522_TreatyBrotherhoodCooperationCoordination.pdf (accessed August 26, 2015).
[482] Krayem, 420.
[483] Sinkaya, 134.
[484] Eitan Azani, Hezbollah: *The Story of the Party of God, from Radicalization to Institutionalization*, (New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2009), 89.
[485] Azani, 95; Norton (2009), 99-100.
[486] Azani, 98-99.

other Lebanese but among potential external balancers, particularly in Europe and the Middle East. Increased legitimacy would both increase Hezbollah's operational effectiveness and – inasmuch as Iran's support had been grandfathered into the current Lebanese status quo – increase Iranian deniability.

With this close a relationship between Iran and Hezbollah, it was worthwhile to question whether Hezbollah was properly been called a proxy or simply an appendage of the IRGC. Hezbollah received its ideology, military support, and financial patronage from Iran. It had tactical and operational independence, but strategically obeyed Tehran and adapted rapidly to Tehran's shifting goals. There were also IRGC personnel in Lebanon for training, and apocryphally to help the Hezbollahis use some advanced weapons. But the IRGC never engaged Israel or other Lebanese on the ground. Iran never threw its combat power into direct operations alongside Hezbollah, unlike Russia during its sponsorship of both Georgian and Ukrainian separatists. Moreover, even if simply a result of geography, those separatists were never permitted the kind of tactical independence Hezbollah was allowed by Iran. Iranian IRGC personnel did not serve as ranking officers for Hezbollah, and the Russian personnel certainly did so for the South Ossetians and Ukrainians. These differences mattered. Particularly in Ukraine, operations by Russian regular troops were flashpoints that incurred more concerted balancing against Moscow in a way that Iran generally avoided. For the purposes of this dissertation, the combination of more tactical independence, lack of Iranian militia leadership, and a lack of direct IRGC involvement in combat served to reduce Iran's fingerprints on the group just slightly. Or more than Russia, anyway, which had a comparatively closer – and less deniable – relationship with its proxies.

II. Conflict

Survival: 2004-2006

Iranian foreign policy became increasingly defensive in the early years of US President George W. Bush's tenure. Iranian President Mohammed Khatami, a reformist, had continued his accelerated his accommodation with the West, but after the terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001 this effort frayed.[487] Iran's relationship with Hezbollah came under increased scrutiny as part of the broader War on Terror. In 2002, Bush described Iran as a member of the "Axis of Evil," officially including it under the general rubric of top targets in the war on terror.[488] In August 2002, an Iranian dissident group released evidence of secret Iranian nuclear facilities at Natanz. Khatami's government spent the next two years working to prevent its nuclear dossier from being remanded to the UN Security Council, amidst unprecedented international pressure.[489] Perhaps most pressing, the American invasion of Iraq brought US troops to Iran's doorstep, to coincide with its forces to the east in Afghanistan. All of these events reinforced the basically defensive posture he had set Iran during his first term in office. Iran wanted to retain what it had, but not draw too much attention from the US and others.

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[487] Hunter, 212.
[488] "'Axis of Evil' Comment Angers Iran," *CBS News* (February 11, 2002), http://www.cbsnews.com/news/axis-of-evil-comment-angers-iran/ (accessed August 4, 2017).
[489] Hunter (2010), 90.

Hezbollah likewise settled into a basically defensive orientation. Above all, it wanted to retain its arms and its determinative place in Lebanon provided by those arms. However, it had to sustain a certain level of conflict with Israel to justify its exceptional armed status. That justification was less legal than political: increased conflict with Israel would both justify its militancy, validate its identity as a "resistance" organization in a US-dominated Middle East (not just a sectarian militia), and fracture Lebanese political opposition to its weapons. That rationale had become thinner after the total Israeli withdrawal from Lebanon and the dissolution of its allied South Lebanon Army in 2000. Hezbollah claimed that Israel was still occupying the Shebaa Farms, a slice of territory the UN recognized as part of Syria. The group engaged in a lower intensity level of conflict, mostly harassment operations against Israeli targets in the Shebaa area. These operations became regularized, even stylized, reflecting its lower-intensity effort to effect strategic change. So-called "rules of the game" were established, creating semi-regular guidelines to escalation management and target selection.[490] It did not quite square the political circle, however, and Lebanese opposition to Hezbollah's military operations increased as the Israeli presence diminished.[491]

This mounting domestic opposition to Hezbollah in 2004 and the changed strategic environment led to the first international contestation of Lebanon's strategic orientation since the Taif accords. That summer, Iran's ally Syria ignited a crisis by attempting to force the Lebanese parliament to amend Lebanon's constitution to allow the compliant President Emile Lahoud a third term in office. The Christian Lahoud served as

[490] Norton (2009), 134-135.
[491] Talal Nizameddin, "The Political Economy of Lebanon Under Rafiq Hariri: An interpretation," *Middle East Journal* 60, no. 1 (Winter, 2006): 101.

a political guarantor that Hezbollah would be able to retain its weapons and an aggressive check on the country's Prime Minister, Rafic Hariri.[492] Hariri was a Sunni outsider who in his first term as prime minister during the early nineties had sought to normalize the post-Taif status quo.[493] But this time was different. Hariri was already clashing regularly with Syria and Hezbollah, whose military operations and evident lawlessness hurt Lebanon's reconstruction and foreign investment, and Hariri wanted Lahoud gone.[494] On August 26, he was abruptly summoned to Damascus for a short, ugly meeting with Syrian President Bashar Assad, who threatened to "break Lebanon on [his] head" if he didn't comply with the extension.[495] This overt intervention in Lebanese domestic politics roused international opposition. One day before the constitutional vote on Lahoud's term limits, the United Nations Security Council passed UNSCR 1559, a French and American resolution calling for all foreign troops to leave Lebanon and the disarming of all remaining militias.[496] Hariri resigned a month later.[497] Lebanese opposition to Syria's presence increased throughout the fall, including among veteran Lebanese politicians like Druze leader Walid Jumblatt, and coalesced around Hariri.[498] Syria responded with

[492] Norton, 125.
[493] Joshua Gleis and Benedetta Berti, *Hezbollah and Hamas: A Comparative Study* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 2012), 24.
[494] Nizameddin, 102; Norton (2009), 125
[495] Kareem Shaheen, "Jumblatt Urged Hariri to Leave Lebanon After Assad Meet," *Daily Star* (November 20, 2014), http://www.dailystar.com.lb/News/Lebanon-News/2014/Nov-20/278275-jumblatt-urged-hariri-to-leave-lebanon-after-assad-meet.ashx (accessed on August 27, 2015).
[496] United Nations, "Resolution 1559," S/RES/1559 (2004), http://daccess-dds-ny.un.org/doc/UNDOC/GE-N/N04/498/92/PDF/-N0449892.pdf?OpenElement (accessed August 27, 2015).
[497] John Kifner, "Lebanon Agrees to Extend Term of Leader," *The New York Times* (September 4, 2004), http://www.nytimes.com/2004/09/04/world/middleeast/l-ebanon-agrees-to-extend-term-of-leader-imposed-by-syria.html (accessed on August 26, 2015).
[498] Norton, 126.

physical threats to opposition leaders. Then, on February 14, 2005, Hariri was driving past the Hotel St. George in Beirut when his motorcade was hit with a massive explosion that killed him and twenty-one others.[499]

The international response was swift, unprecedented for a Lebanese political murder, and coalesced quickly around on removing Syria's troop presence from Lebanon. U.S. Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice issued an immediate statement that condemned the bombing and called for the implementation of UN Security Council Resolution 1559. Assistant Secretary of State for Near Eastern Affairs Nicholas Burns in remarks that day also called for the implementation of 1559, like Rice calling out Syria – but only Syria – by name.[500] On February 15, the United States withdrew its ambassador from Damascus in protest. Scott McClellan, the White House spokesman, made it clear the withdrawal was in response to the bombing and focused particularly on Syria's military forces. He referred to "serious concerns" about Syria's behavior, saying "Syria and their troop presence in Lebanon is [sic] a destabilizing voice in the region." He added: "…the terrorist attack that took place yesterday on former Prime Minister Hariri underscored the importance of Syria taking steps to change its behavior, by withdrawing its forces."[501] There was remarkable international consensus around removing this presence, particularly given the schisms Bush's Iraq War had caused in the western alliance.

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[499] United Nations, "Report of the Fact-Finding Mission to Lebanon inquiring into the causes, circumstances, and consequences of the assassination of former Prime Minister Rafik Hariri," S/205/203 (March 24, 2005), http://unispal.un.org/UNISPAL.NSF/0/79CD8AAA858FDD2D85256FD500536047 (accessed on September 1, 2015).

[500] U.S. Department of State, "Death of Former Prime Minister of Lebanon" (February 16, 2005), https://2001-2009.state.gov/p/nea/rls/rm/42344.htm (accessed September 20, 2017).

[501] The White House, "Press Briefing by Scott McClellan" (February 15, 2005), https://georgewbush-whitehouse.archives.gov/news/releases/2005/02/20050215-4.html (accessed February 16, 2020).

United Kingdom Prime Minister Tony Blair, German Chancellor Gerhard Schroeder, and French Prime Minister Jacques Chirac all issued similar calls.

Facing intense pressure, Damascus began to bend. Syria offered several compromises in an attempt to retain its whole footprint and delay action on its troop presence until the international pressure either stalled out or fractured. First, it suggested a partial withdrawal by the end of March and then negotiations for a complete withdrawal. The US refused. A White House spokesman called it a "half measure that does not go far enough." Then Assad suggested a different way, promising to withdraw all forces to the Bekaa Valley where Hezbollah and Iran's IRGC were present. In public remarks, Bush rejected that option as well, again calling it a "half measure."

By early March the US began to realize that just removing Syria's military presence would not be sufficient. Rice broadened the focus slightly to try and encompass the whole Syrian apparatus in public statements on March 3 and 4, saying that "UNSC Resolution 1559 says withdraw your troops. It is also the case they need to withdraw their security personnel because Syrian security personnel, their intelligence services, cast a long shadow over Lebanon, and it is going to be very difficult for the Lebanese people to exercise their franchise freely in the upcoming elections with Syrian personnel still there."[502]

Bush echoed that addition during an interview a day later, saying "Lebanese citizens who have watched free elections in Iraq are now demanding the right to decide their own destiny, free of Syrian control and domination" and that "a Syrian withdrawal of all its military and intelligence personnel would help ensure that the Lebanese

[502] U.S. Department of State, "Interview with Jim Lehrer of The NewsHour," https://2001-2009.state.gov/secretary/rm/2005/42999.htm (accessed February 15, 2020).

elections occur as scheduled in the spring, and that they will be free and fair."[503] Bush expanded on the more comprehensive theme on March 16, recognizing that even a full troop withdrawal itself would not be sufficient, saying "We believe that there will be a thriving democracy, but only if – the but only if – Syria withdraws not only her troops completely out of Lebanon, but also her secret service organizations, intelligence organizations -- not secret service, intelligence organizations."[504]

But what the US casually described as Syria's intelligence organizations was actually a heuristic for the proxy support that guaranteed the broader hard-power basis of Lebanon's strategic orientation. This support represented a coalition of forces that guaranteed Lebanon's strategic orientation. This coalition had three legs: Syria's support, Iran's support, and Hezbollah's domestic legitimacy. Syria's support was itself comprised of both its military presence – the 30,000 troops left over from the civil war – and its intelligence and security apparatus. While certainly its military had equities in remaining in Lebanon, networks of corruption and influence that had become entrenched over two decades, the strategic orientation of Lebanon was not dependent on it. In fact, that troop presence was actually a liability to Syria's (and more importantly, Hezbollah and Iran's) strategic control of the country because it delegitimized the latter two legs of the stool and gave the international community a visible target to balance against. It was no coincidence that the primary leverage point for the international community was the most visible, and the more deniable links – ipso facto, the more effective links – endured.

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[503] The White House "The President's radio address" (March 5, 2005), https://www.govinfo.gov/content/pkg/PPP-2005-book1/pdf/PPP-2005-book1-doc-pg376.pdf (accessed February 16, 2020).
[504] The White House, "President's Press Conference" (March 16, 2005), https://georgewbush-whitehouse.archives.gov/news/releases/2005/03/20050316-3.html (accessed February 16, 2020).

The irony was that the thriving democracy Bush referenced had less to do with Syria's troop presence and more to do with the rest of the coalition of influence that allowed Hezbollah to remain under arms: not just Syria but Iran and Hezbollah's domestic political legitimacy. The key strategic concern for Hezbollah was not necessarily keeping Syrian forces in the country, which was disproportionately easy for the international community to oppose, less justifiable domestically, and not as proportionately critical to its power in Lebanon. Rather, it was the UN's investigation into the Hariri killing and subsequently the Special Tribunal for Lebanon (STL). Opposing the investigation was a top priority of Nasrallah, who routinely referred to it as a US-Zionist conspiracy.[505] It primarily targeted the second and third legs of the coalition's power, the more shadowy proxy support it received from Iran and Syria and the legitimacy it enjoyed among the international community. Critical to this legitimacy was Hezbollah's use of anti-Israeli operations to justify its special status. Hezbollah's exceptionalism allowed it to maintain an advantageous sectarian power balance without incurring internal and external balancing. It would lose legitimacy as it appeared less organic to the population, less related to the fight against Israel, and more sectarian and inwardly-focused on power. By publicly indicting Hezbollah for sectarian murder to maintain its privileged posture, the investigation could certify the elimination of the fiction that Hezbollah acted on behalf of the nation and give its enemies something more tangible to balance against.

[505] For example, see "Sayyed Hasan Nasrallah Press Conference in Beirut," *Jafria News* (July 26, 2010), https://jafrianews.com/2010/07/26/full-text-sayyed-hasan-nasrallah-press-conference-in-beirut/ (accessed September 10, 2017).

This was a key point in Hezbollah's decision to launch street protests on March 8, 2005, when half a million Hezbollah and Amal members rallied in Beirut to support Lahoud and oppose a foreign investigation. The demonstrations were not explicitly demanding that Syrian troops remain. Instead, Hezbollah tried to insist that any investigation into the Hariri killing consist solely of Lebanese, who would be more subject to local pressure.[506] It was not enough: a rival demonstration brought over a million people to the main square of Beirut on March 14, demanding an investigation into Hariri's murder and the formation of a national government. The UN dispatched a fact-finding team which declared in March that Syria bore the responsibility for increasing Lebanon's political tension through its meddling.[507] On April 7, the Security Council established the UN International Independent Investigating Commission (UNIIIC) to more thoroughly investigate the Hariri murder.[508] Under heavy international pressure, Syria announced its total military withdrawal from Lebanon on April 26, 2005.

However, even with the ongoing investigation, it was more challenging to leverage US and international pressure against the remaining parts of Hezbollah's strategic coalition, which were more covert and thus deniable. The challenge of more deniable support made it more difficult to focus attention other than through the work of the investigators, and the intricacies of Lebanese domestic politics were – unsurprisingly

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[506] Norton (2009), 131.
[507] United Nations, "Report of the Fact-Finding Mission to Lebanon inquiring into the causes, circumstances, and consequences of the assassination of former Prime Minister Rafik Hariri," S/205/203 (March 24, 2005), http://unispal.un.org/UNISPAL.NSF/0/79CD8AAA858FDD2D85256FD500536047 (accessed on September 1, 2015).
[508] United Nations, "Resolution 1595," S/RES/1595 (2005), http://daccess-dds-ny.un.org/doc/UNDOC/GE-N/N05/299/98/PDF-/N0529998.pdf?OpenElement (accessed on August 28, 2015).

– less of a leverage point than Syria's military had been. The IRGC and Syria's intelligence personnel were still in Lebanon. Bush reiterated when the report of the investigative chief Detlev Metlis report came out on October 24, 2005 two themes: one, that the international community was united, and two, that the intelligence services needed to get out. They did not. Iran, for its part, had escaped curiously undamaged throughout the entire Hariri affair, though it was an integral part of the same coalition the US was set on dismantling. Bush's only early reference to Iran in the context of Hariri was on February 21, and then only in the context of Iran's use of Hezbollah to threaten Israel and the peace process.[509] It was not until May 19, over two months later, when the top US career diplomat, Undersecretary of State Nicholas Burns, mentioned Iranian support for Hezbollah in the domestic Lebanese context.[510] However, he only referred to Iran's role in the broader context of UNSCR 1559, not Hariri's killing.[511] This was somewhat understandable, since no direct evidence linked the murder to Iran and US pressure on this point might have fractured the international consensus. But it was also a key element – probably the key element – of Hezbollah's ability to do what it did.

The UN effort did have internal consequences. The Metlis investigation did damage to Hezbollah's domestic political standing. Once Hezbollah's effort to block an investigation failed, and Metlis began to name names, it frayed Lebanon's fragile national consensus. In December 2005, the Lebanese parliament voted to authorize an international tribunal to try suspects in the Hariri murder, forcing Hezbollah and affiliated

[509] The White House, "Global Message" (February 21, 2005), https://georgewbush-whitehouse.archives.gov/news/releases/2005/02/20050221-3.html (accessed February 17, 2020).
[510] U.S. Department of State, "United States Policy Towards Iran" (May 19, 2005), https://2001-2009.state.gov/p/us/rm/2005/46528.htm (accessed August 18, 2017).
[511] "Bush: U.N. Hariri report 'deeply disturbing'," *CNN* (October 21, 2005), http://www.cnn.com/2005/-WORLD/meast/10/21/bush.hariri/ (accessed August 19, 2017).

members to walk out. Domestic political pressure on Hezbollah increased through the winter and spring of 2006, including public mockery of its armed status.[512] Even a bombing campaign against leading public figures like columnist Samir Kassir failed to abort Lebanese cooperation with the tribunal. For the most part, though, Lebanese of other sectarian factions needed no prodding to understand that Hezbollah was a sectarian actor intent on retaining its power. But they could not alter the status quo alone; they needed support since Hezbollah had guns and they did not.

However, it was challenging for the international community that supported the March 14 coalition to add tangible support to the investigation and against Hezbollah's political legitimacy, even at a time of nearly-unified political balancing. When asked about that political legitimacy early after the Hariri assassination, White House spokesman McClellan dodged. He repeated that Hezbollah was a terrorist organization, and urged disarmament of all militias per UNSCR 1559. In an interview in March 2006, Bush was vague about what other steps needed to be taken. He called for an "open and free and transparent society," adding, "peace in Lebanon is going to be achieved…by people in Lebanon who are dedicated to the future." Rather than more international pressure, "ultimately the decisions have to be made by the Lebanese citizens that they want something better than violence and war and division." On Lahoud, he was again mushy, saying "I think the characteristics for the President ought to be somebody who is independent-minded, somebody who focuses on his -- the future of the country,

[512] Norton, 132-133.

somebody who understands that foreign influences inside of a country can be very negative."[513]

In point of fact, the independence or not-independence of the Lebanese president depended on the special status of Hezbollah in the country as an unbridgeable spoiler faction. The group's special domestic position – and its value as a proxy – came from its weapons and its weapons came from Iran. Indeed, it was Iranian support that made Hezbollah an international problem: i.e., a problem that could not be handled by any or all of the other Lebanese factions domestically, which had no such backing. Calling for the implementation of UNSCR 1559 but not expanding the aperture specifically beyond Syria suggested that Iran (and a certain portion of Hezbollah's exceptionalism) had more deniability than Syria did. Iranian support could be justified sufficiently as protection against Israel. Hezbollah just needed a war.

The July War

On July 12, 2006, less than three weeks after Hamas seized an Israeli soldier in Gaza, Hezbollah conducted a raid across the Israeli border, capturing two Israeli soldiers and killing three. The IDF quickly threw a second unit after them, a rescue team with tank support. After the tank hit a mine and the team was withdrawn, Israel's Minister of Defense Amir Peretz ordered a major offensive.[514]

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[513] The White House, "Interview with Diana Moukalled of Future Television of Lebanon" (March 9, 2006) https://www.govinfo.gov/content/pkg/PPP-2006-book1/pdf/PPP-2006-book1-doc-pg438.pdf (accessed February 17, 2020).
[514] Benjamin Lambeth, "Air Operations in Israel's War Against Hezbollah: Learning from Lebanon and Getting It Right in Gaza," (Santa Monica, CA: RAND Corporation, 2011), 85.

Israel's response was not entirely extraordinary. It had reacted harshly to a Hezbollah rocket attack two months earlier that escalated into a heavy tit-for-tat exchange of rocket fire. However, the conflict was not the result of an Iranian or Hezbollah strategic initiative. Indeed, Nasrallah would admit later that had he known the scale of the Israeli response, the chances of launching such an operation would have been "not even one percent."[515] It arose from a strategic Israeli response to a Hezbollah tactical initiative, an attempt by Jerusalem to restore its military deterrent and change the strategic balance in the south.[516] But Hezbollah was fortunate. Not only did Israel not achieve its goals, the key strategic outcome of the conflict was the shattering of the external diplomatic consensus pressuring Hezbollah, including the US, Britain, the EU, and many Sunni Arab states. This coalition had empowered domestic Lebanese opposition to Hezbollah, threatening the group's proxy relationships and thus its existence.

Initially, the US came down hard on both Hezbollah and its sponsors in its initial statement after the kidnapping, calling it an "unprovoked act of terrorism," and that "we also hold Syria and Iran, which have provided long-standing support for Hezbollah, responsible for today's violence." It also poked at Hezbollah's domestic legitimacy, saying that the actions "threaten Lebanon's security and are an affront to the sovereignty of the Lebanese Government. Hezbollah's actions are not in the interest of the Lebanese people, whose welfare should not be held hostage to the interests of the Syrian and

[515] Norton (2009), 137.
[516] Israeli Ministry of Foreign Affairs, "PM Olmert: Lebanon is responsible and will bear the consequences," (July 12, 2006), http://www.mfa.gov.il/mfa/pressroom-/2006/pages/pm%20olmert%20-%-20lebanon%20is%20responsible%20and%-20will%20bear%20the%20consequences%2012-jul-2006.aspx (accessed January 9, 2016).

Iranian regimes."[517] It was not alone: the regional backers of the March 14 coalition and other Arab states reacted to the war with condemnation of Hezbollah. Saudi Arabia, Jordan, Egypt, several Gulf monarchies, and the Palestinian Authority all criticized Nasrallah's actions five days after the initial operation, calling the attacks "unexpected, inappropriate, and irresponsible."[518] The source of that opposition was not hard to trace: it was largely linked to the threat of Iran.

In the subsequent fighting, Hezbollah was almost entirely on its own and proved again resilient even in conventional combat against Israeli units. Part of this was due to the disconnect between Israel's strategic goals and its means. Its goals were wildly ambitious: In a press conference Israeli Prime Minister Ehud Olmert laid out four objectives for a campaign against Hezbollah. First, the kidnapped soldiers would be returned home. Second, Israel would change the strategic situation on its border with Lebanon. Third, Israel would rebuild its military deterrent, which had lost some of its luster since the military's withdrawal from Lebanon in 2000. Lastly, all Hezbollah fighters in the south of Lebanon would be disarmed.[519] These were almost farcical goals, ambitions Israel had not been able to achieve during 18 years of occupying Lebanon with its own forces and its own proxy army. They were even more unlikely because there was little desire among the Israelis to commit ground forces to Lebanon; the IDF thus initially

[517] The White House, "Statement on Condemnation of Hezbollah Kidnapping of Two Israeli Soldiers," (July 12, 2006), https://georgewbush-whitehouse.archives.gov/news/releases/2006/07/20060712.html (accessed February 17, 2020).
[518] Hassan Fattah, "Arab League criticizes Hezbollah for attacks," *The New York Times* (July 17, 2006), http://www.nytimes.com/2006/07/17/world/africa/17iht-arabs.-2224812.html?_r=0 (accessed December 15, 2015).
[519] "Address to the Knesset by Prime Minister Ehud Olmert," Israel Ministry of Foreign Affairs (July 17, 2006), http://mfa.gov.il/MFA/PressRoom/2006/Pages/Address%20to%20the%20Knesset%20by%20PM%20Olmert%2017-Jul-2006.aspx (accessed September 9, 2017).

relied on stand-off attacks with artillery and air strikes.[520] These began with airstrikes on the night of July 12-13 against (among other targets) Hezbollah's leadership offices, main television station, and two Lebanese military airfields.[521] In response, Hezbollah initiated a rocket bombardment against civilian targets as far south as Haifa.

One of the long-running impediments for Iran retaining deniability in its support for Hezbollah was that as Israel withdrew to its own territory, and rolled up its "security zones," its border with Lebanon became more defined and less ambiguous. This posed a problem. A more defined border meant that its capacities would have to be greater to inflict damage. However, it also meant that successful attacks would have to be more complex and high-profile, and thus more obviously interstate aggression, proving an easier target for international opposition and lowering its sponsor's deniability. This border issue helped to make long-range rockets particularly attractive weapons. Prior to the Lebanon 2006 war, Iran had supplied Hezbollah with tens of thousands of rockets, including advanced *Fajr* and *Khaybar* missiles as well as Katyushas. It had also supplied anti-ship missiles and unmanned aerial drones.[522] The bombardment lasted throughout the conflict.[523] These weapons were effective at maintaining Hezbollah's level of military conflict with Israel and thus mantle of resistance, but also were quite clearly Iranian- and Syrian-supplied (and -operated, allegedly, in a few cases). Indeed, it is telling that Israeli complaints of Iranian involvement often came against the group's high-

[520] Lambeth, 88.
[521] Lambeth, 87; William Arkin, "Divining Victory: Airpower in the 2006 Israel-Hezbollah War," (Maxwell AFB, AL: Air University Press, 2007), 16.
[522] Kenneth Katzman, "Iran: U.S. Concerns and Policy Responses," CRS Report RL32048 (Washington, DC: Library of Congress, Congressional Research Service, June 22, 2009), 32.
[523] Human Rights Watch, "Lebanon: Hezbollah Rocket Attacks on Haifa Designed to Kill Civilians," (July 17, 2006), https://www.hrw.org/news/2006/07/17/lebanon-hezbollah-rocket-attacks-haifa-designed-kill-civilians (accessed December 20, 2015).

tech missile capability. Unlike the rockets, this advanced capability did not significantly alter the balance or power between the two sides, but did draw attention to Iran's role. For example, Hezbollah successfully hit the Israeli Navy ship *Hanit* on July 14 with an Iranian-made anti-ship missile, a sophisticated weapon the Israeli military believed required the direct involvement of Iranian specialists.[524] On July 18, Olmert went further, blaming Iran for timing the initial attack to divert attention from international opposition to its nuclear program at home.[525]

During these first weeks, the international community stayed mostly united against Hezbollah and its sponsors, but the cracks were beginning to show. The G8 summit statement on July 16, 2006 blamed Hezbollah and Hamas for igniting the conflict, but did not name check Syria and Iran specifically. Rather it referred to "extremist elements" the US insisted meant Iran and Syria as the "backers and funders of Hezbollah.[526] The fissures grew deeper as Israel's operations against Hezbollah symmetric warfare caused civilian casualties. The statement also called for Israeli restraint and to avoid innocent civilians. France had been a close partner of the US with regards to UNSC 1559, but already felt that Israel was acting disproportionately, with French President Jacques Chirac stating that Israel had used excessive force.[527] Russian President Vladimir Putin darkly hinted that Israel seemed to be pursuing "wider goals" in

[524] Lambeth, 37.
[525] "PM Olmert meets with new Israeli ambassadors and chiefs-of-mission," Israel Ministry of Foreign Affairs (July 18, 2006), http://mfa.gov.il/MFA/PressRoom/2006/Pages/PM%20Olmert%20meets%20-with%20new%20Israeli%20ambassadors%20%2018-Jul-2006.aspx (accessed September 12, 2017).
[526] U.S. Department of State, "Press Briefing on the G8 Leaders Joint Statement on the Situation in the Middle East" (July 16, 2006), https://2001-2009.state.gov/p/us/rm/2006/69071.htm (accessed February 17, 2020).
[527] Sami Baroudi and Imad Salamey, "US-French Collaboration on Lebanon: How Syria's Role in Lebanon and the Middle East Contributed to a US-French Convergence," *Middle East Journal* 65, no. 3 (Summer 2011): 413.

the conflict.[528] In a White House press briefing following the G8 meeting, Under Secretary of State Nick Burns acknowledged these tensions but stressed that on UNSC 1559 and other priorities like Iran's nuclear program, there was nonetheless diplomatic consensus.[529]

Bush remained willing to continue to call out Hezbollah's sponsors by name, as he did in his weekly radio address. The war was, in fact, having the effect of prioritizing Iran over Syria as the guilty party in the eyes of the United States. But in his joint press conference with Tony Blair, his ally was going the other direction. Bush named Iran and Syria as the antagonists in the context of Lebanese domestic politics, and demanded they stop using "violence to stop the spread of peace and democracy." He described that support – particularly Iranian support – the "root cause" of the instability with Israel. The order of priority was reversed: he was beginning to call out Iran alone and then Iran and Syria. But Blair could not go that far, only calling for a Lebanon "free of militias and foreign interference, and a Lebanon that governs its own destiny, as is called for by UN Security Council Resolutions 1559 and 1680." He would not even allude to the culpability of "sponsors" or some such construction.[530]

These fissures were exacerbated by Israel's early strategic decision to treat Hezbollah and the Lebanese government as one and the same; or, at least, to expand greatly the range of national government facilities it considered legitimate targets. This

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[528] "Blair, Annan Call for International Troops in Lebanon," *NPR* (July 17, 2006), https://legacy.npr.org/-programs/morning/transcripts/2006/jul/060717.feifer.html (accessed February 18, 2020).
[529] U.S. Department of State, "Press Briefing on the G8 Leaders Joint Statement on the Situation in the Middle East" (July 16, 2006), https://2001-2009.state.gov/p/us/rm/2006/69071.htm (accessed February 18, 2020).
[530] The White House, "President Bush and Prime Minister Blair of the United Kingdom Participate in Press Availability," (July 28, 2006), https://georgewbush-whitehouse.archives.gov/news/releases/2006/07/2006-0728-1.html (accessed February 19, 2020).

included some of Lebanon's civilian infrastructure. Olmert publicly blamed the Lebanese government as a whole for the war, saying it was the action of a "sovereign state" trying to undermine regional stability.[531] After the *Hanit* attack, Israel claimed that the Lebanese government had sent targeting data to the missile crew and responded by destroying Lebanese radar stations. Israeli aircraft subsequently hit bridges and ports across southern Lebanon, as well as gasoline depots, food stations, and Beirut international airport.[532] Militarily, this made some sense. The attacks could cut off Hezbollah's units in southern Lebanon, allow for more saturated airstrikes, and perhaps bring home to the Lebanese population some of the cost of facilitating Hezbollah's operations. But it had a strategic cost. Conflating the two essentially bought into Hezbollah's argument that it was a national organization and thus increased Iran's deniability about projecting power. However much the other Lebanese factions might like to confront Hezbollah, they could not without external support, which was damaged by Israel's actions. The Lebanese government was forced to issue condemnations of the Israeli attacks, validating Iran and Syria's position and (most critically) fissures among its own external backers, which included Israeli allies.[533] Potentially supportive external powers, such as Saudi Arabia and Egypt, were forced to issue statements condemning Israel, rather than Iran or Hezbollah. Given the internal pressure Hezbollah was under at that time, it was the wrong choice.

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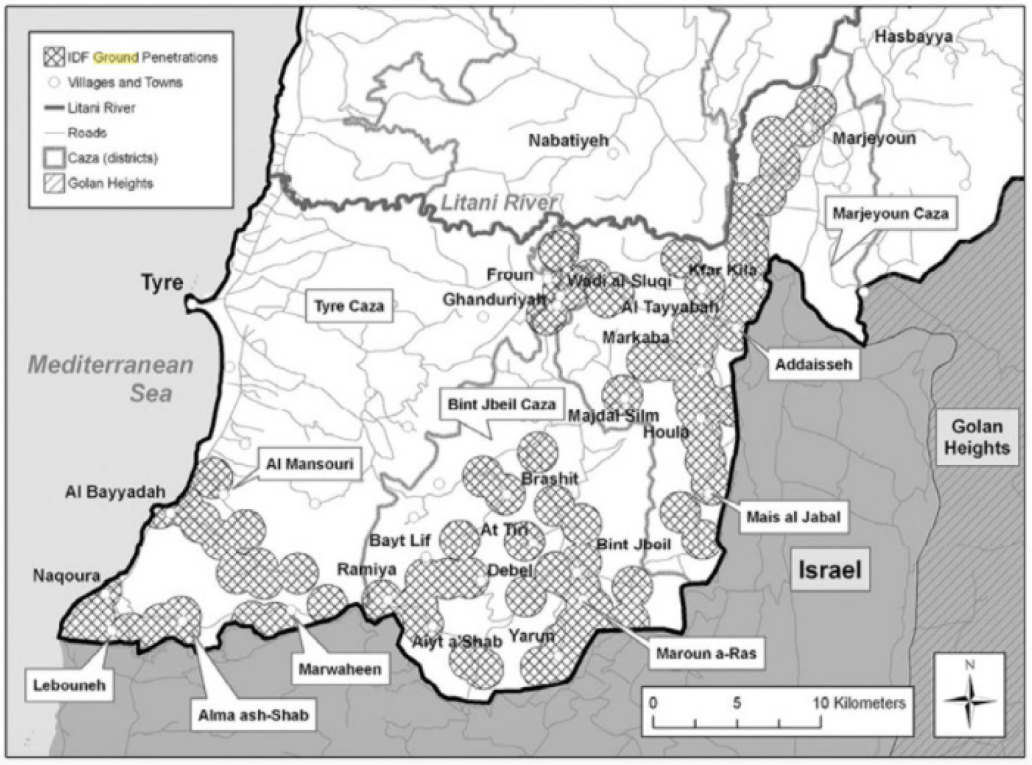
[531] Israel Ministry of Foreign Affairs, "PM Olmert: Lebanon is responsible and will bear the consequences" (July 12, 2006), http://mfa.gov.il/MFA/PressRoom/2006/Pages/PM%20Olmert%20-%20Lebanon%20is%20responsible%20and%20will%20bear%20the%20consequences%2012-Jul-2006.aspx (accessed August 30, 2017).
[532] Norton, 138.
[533] For example, "Lebanon condemns Israel 'madness,'" *BBC* (July 18, 2006), http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/5192036.stm (accessed August 29, 2017).

This dynamic became more acute after Israeli forces began their ground offensive into Lebanon on July 19. Israeli forces entered a number of Shia border towns like Maroun ar-Ras and Bint Jbeil, which they reached on July 24.[534] As combat intensified, civilian casualties increased. On July 30, Israeli forces struck a residential complex in the town of Qana, killing sixteen children among the twenty-eight civilian casualties. Amidst international uproar, Israel agreed to halt airstrikes for forty-eight hours while the UN evacuated additional civilians from the area.[535]



Source: Arkin, 52.

The US tried to sit on the growing disagreement. At US National Security Advisor Stephen Hadley's press briefing on August 6, he stressed the international

[534] Arkin, 51.
[535] Steven Erlanger and Hassan Fattah, "Israel Halts Bombing After Deadly Strike," *The New York Times* (July 30, 2006), http://www.nytimes.com/2006/07/30/worl-d/middleeast/30cnd-mideast.html?pagewanted-=all (accessed January 10, 2016).

consensus around Hezbollah that had existed on 1559, and stated that the document "sets out the framework that we have really been pursuing since then." And that Hezbollah was the offending party, so that logically the international consensus that existed on 1559 applied to the war. He argued that since 1559 "made clear that [Hezbollah] were supported by Syria and Iran. So the international community has made very clear who the offending party here is." Under questioning, he stressed that the nuclear consensus and the recent Security Council vote on a sanctions resolution was a signal to Iran, even in the context of the Lebanese crisis, and that the international community was united on the broader issue of Iran.[536] But it was not.

By early August, the diplomatic focus on those sponsors had totally broken down. After a second major Israeli push on August 9-10, a UN-brokered ceasefire came into effect on August 14.[537] Over a thousand Lebanese civilians would eventually be killed by the war.[538] Human Rights Watch called Israeli attacks "indiscriminate" and suggested they may have amounted to war crimes.[539] The day of the ceasefire, Bush remained resolute in a speech to the State Department when he again blamed Hezbollah's sponsors, particularly Iran, with their domestic hardship. "Responsibility for the suffering of the Lebanese people," he said, "also lies with Hezbollah's state sponsors, Iran and Syria. The regime in Iran provides Hezbollah with financial support, weapons, and training," and "Syria allows Iranian weapons to pass through its territory into Lebanon." He followed

[536] The White House, "Press Briefing by National Security Advisor Stephen Hadley" (August 6, 2006), https://georgewbush-whitehouse.archives.gov/news/releases/2006/08/20060806.html (accessed February 19, 2020).
[537] Arkin, 51.
[538] Lambeth, 91.
[539] "Why They Died: Civilian Casualties in Lebanon during the 2006 War," Human Rights Watch (September 5, 2007), 8-13, https://www.hrw.org/report/2007/09/05/why-they-died/civilian-casualties-lebanon-during-2006-war (accessed August 24, 2017).

on to stress that "the task is more than just helping the Siniora government; the task is … to continually remind the Iranians of their obligations, their obligations not to develop a nuclear weapons program, their obligations not to foster terrorism and promote terrorism." The White House specifically referred to $150-$200 million that Hezbollah received from Iran each year.[540]

The increased human cost of the war strengthened Hezbollah by coopting or sidelining potential supporters of its domestic rivals and enemies of its supporters, Iran and Syria. After Qana, Sunni Arab countries were forced to state decisively their opposition to the Israeli campaign, abandoning their earlier positions and adding their voices to those calling for a ceasefire. Egyptian President Hosni Mubarak said his country "condemns the irresponsible Israeli attack on the Lebanese village of Qana which led to the loss of innocent victims, most of which were women and children," and urged a halt to the war.[541] The UN's Secretary-General Kofi Annan called for the Security Council to condemn the Qana attack as well.[542] Most significantly, British Prime Minister Tony Blair faced a mutiny when his former Foreign Secretary Jack Straw and others condemned Israel's actions or broke with Blair's support of US policy.[543]

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[540] The White House, "President Discusses Foreign Policy During Visit to State Department," (August 14, 2006), https://georgewbush-whitehouse.archives.gov/news/releases/2006/08/20060814-3.html (accessed February 21, 2020).
[541] "Israel condemned for Qana massacre, ceasefire calls mount," *Hurriyet Daily News* (July 31, 2006), http://www.hurriyetdailynews.com/israel-condemned-for-qana-massacre-ceasefire-calls-mount.aspx?page-ID=438&n=israel-condemned-for-qana-massacre-ceasefire-calls-mount-2006-07-31 (accessed December 15, 2015).
[542] UN Press Release, "Secretary-General urges Security Council to Condemn Israeli Attack on Qana, Call For Immediate Cessation of Hostilities, In Statement to Emergency Meeting," SG/SM/10580-SC/8790 (July 30, 2015), http://www.un.or-g/press/en/2006/sgsm10-580.doc.htm (accessed January 7, 2016).
[543] Patrick Hennessy, "Straw leads revolt against Blair over Israel crisis," *The Daily Telegraph* (July 30, 2006), http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/1525205/Straw-leads-revolt-against-Blair-over-Israel-crisis.html (accessed September 15, 2017).

Overall, Hezbollah had been rehabilitated by the conflict: not, significantly, because its own position domestically had been strengthened, but because that of its external opponents (and thus their potential support to internal proxies) had been weakened. Israel had publicly failed to achieve any of its goals. Despite an estimated five to one fatality ratio, Hezbollah's battlefield effectiveness remained intact, particularly its missile capabilities, which continued to fire on Israel at a high rate until the end.[544] The resolution ending the war, UNSC 1701, expanded the UN's peacekeeping force in southern Lebanon along the border with Israel and called for the deployment of government forces throughout the south. It also demanded that Iran and Syria stop arming Hezbollah. However, since the enforcement of 1701 depended on the political will of the same states that were now fractured, it did not fundamentally change UNIFIL's disinterest in confronting Hezbollah. Most significantly, the war had completely fractured the US-European-Sunni Arab coalition supporting the March 14 alliance in Lebanon. Without counter-support to its opponents, Hezbollah's operational capacity would be enough domestically to win any confrontation. That support, if it came, would likely be quantitatively less, since fewer nations were united on it. And it would be less justified, and thus deniable as aggression, because its recipients' enemy – Hezbollah – appeared to have been on the defensive against Israel.

[544] Norton, 138; Israel Ministry of Foreign Affairs, "Victims of Rocket Attacks and IDF Casualties" (July 12, 2006), http://www.mfa.gov.il/mfa/foreignpolicy/terrorism/hizbullah-/pages/israel-hizbullah%20conflict%20victims%20of%20rocket%20attacks%2-0and%20idf-%20casualties%20july-aug%202006.aspx (accessed December 12, 2006).

Reassertion: Lebanon's Political Crisis, 2006-2008

Iran had largely stayed out of the war. Partly this was its model of proxy support: Hezbollah took the lead in fighting, and the IRGC stayed out of operational positions, focusing on weapons supply and financing. Iran was mostly relegated to condemning Israel's action, threatening retaliation, and complaining about UN inaction and its own exclusion from the negotiating process elsewhere.[545] Iran's primary influence came before and after, through building up Hezbollah's capabilities. After the war, it resupplied Hezbollah nearly double the missile stockpile it had expended.[546] Though like Hezbollah it had been taken by surprise by the escalation of the conflict, broadly speaking Iranian policy was becoming more offensive. Iran's 2005 presidential elections had been won by the conservative Mahmoud Ahmadinejad, who had promised more confrontation with Israel and the West.[547] Tehran's primary focus during this period was next door: the July War came as Iran was increasing its commitment to Shia insurgents in Iraq. In this context, Hezbollah was becoming increasingly useful as a model and trainer for Iranian proxies. Its operatives had reportedly been in Iraq since 2003, coordinating with Shia militia leaders.[548] However, during this period Iran began to greatly expand the number of so-called "special groups" in Iraq, paramilitary units specially trained and armed by Hezbollah and other Iranian agents in particularly lethal tactics.[549] In May 2006, Iran reorganized its special groups to more closely track Hezbollah, with leadership

[545] Simon Tisdall and Ewan MacAskill, "Iran warns the West: ignore us at your peril," *The Guardian* (July 25, 2006), https://www.theguardian.com/world/2006/jul/26/syria.iran (accessed September 25, 2017).
[546] Katzman, 32.
[547] Hunter (2010), 74-98, 229.
[548] Kagan: 6.
[549] Kimberly Kagan, "Iran's Proxy War against the United States and the Iraqi Government," *Iraq Report* (August 20, 2007): 9, http://www.understandingwar.org/sites/default/files/reports/-IraqReport06.pdf (accessed September 15, 2017).

changes and training.[550] The insurgency not only represented a chance to dominate Baghdad, but to humiliate the United States and weaken its influence in the region.

Though there had been domestic opposition to Hezbollah's actions in Lebanon leading up to the July War, the group emerged strengthened. The Sunni, Druze, and Christian opposition elements of the March 14 coalition had not been mollified by the war – if anything, the opposition had been emboldened – but without external help they could not effectively confront Hezbollah.[551] That external help was lacking for a variety of reasons beyond political will. Risk aversion, for one: the United States believed arming sub-national groups was too risky, and focused instead on arming the Lebanese military. Bureaucratic slowness, for another. The first portion of this aid didn't reach the Lebanese armed forces until the fall of 2006.[552] President Bush blamed Assad for Lebanon's political turmoil over the tribunal, but could offer no better remedy than increasing US aid to Lebanon's government.[553] The effective policy output of that aid was unclear, since the Lebanese military showed no signs of being willing to confront Hezbollah or the IRGC. But there was also the prioritization of the Iraq war. As 2006 turned into 2007, and the insurgency in Iraq intensified, the US began looking for places to accommodate Syria, to help stem the flow of foreign fighters, and some officials pushed for Lebanon to be it.[554]

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[550] Kagan: 10.
[551] Paul Salem, "The Aftereffects of the Israeli-Hizbollah War," *Carnegie Endowment for International Peace* (2008) http://carnegieendowment.org/files/PaulSalemChapter.pdf, 4
[552] Eric Edelman and Mara Karlin, "Fool Me Twice: How the United States Lost Lebanon—Again," *World Affairs* 174, no. 1 (May/June 2011): 36.
[553] Ohannes Geukjian, "Political Instability and Conflict after the Syrian Withdrawal from Lebanon," *The Middle East Journal* vol. 68, no. 4 (Autumn 2014): 534.
[554] Edelman and Karlin: 38.

Importantly, there was also no target as clear as the Syrian military to leverage against. Iran still maintained troops in Lebanon, but they were lower profile: they were trainers and enablers, unlike Syria's soldiers that had been the primary agents of influence. And building an international coalition to confront them, with their excuse of the Israeli threat, was far harder (especially postwar) than confronting them or the Syrians over compliance with 1559. Iran aggressively replenished Hezbollah's missile arsenals, to a point where the group was more equipped with more advanced weaponry than before the 2006 war.[555] Iranian support also helped strengthen Hezbollah's domestic legitimacy. Though Hezbollah itself was the agent of Iran's influence, Hezbollah was part of the Lebanese political and social system in a way that Syrian forces were not. This made it much more challenging to counter. Iran, through Hezbollah, had donated significant sums to rehabilitate the south after the August 2006 war, earning itself support among the population and a useful narrative internationally.[556] This served to increase Iran's deniability about its support for Hezbollah.

During this postwar period, Hezbollah aggressively went on the offensive against both the Hariri tribunal and the Siniora government's relative independence. Certainly, Hezbollah believed the tribunal was itself balancing behavior, one more way of the US targeting its arms, and a continuation of UNSCR 1559 and 1701.[557] Its investigation and findings would erode Hezbollah's claim to being a national resistance organization, and thus hurt Iran's deniability about arming the group in defiance of UN Security Council

[555] Michael Rubin, "The Enduring Iran-Syria-Hezbollah Axis," *AEI Middle Eastern Outlook* no. 6, (December 2009): 1, https://www.jstor.org/stable/pdf/resrep03078.pdf?ab_segments=0%2Fbasic_SYC-5152%2Fcontrol&refreqid=search%3A958ab07e86b2b544ee3658954bba61c2 (accessed August 5, 2017).
[556] Magnus Ranstorp, "Hezbollah in the Syrian conflict," in *Lebanon and the Arab Uprisings: In the Eye of the Hurricane*, ed. Maximillian Felsch and Martin Wählisch (New York: Routledge, 2016), 35.
[557] Geukjian, 532.

resolutions. Should the tribunal issue indictments against Hezbollah and its sponsors, it would diminish the fiction that Hezbollah acted on behalf of the nation and potentially ignite balancing behavior on behalf of external powers. If Nasrallah or the political leadership was indicted, Hezbollah's political wing would be at risk of – for example – being designated a terrorist organization, which could impede its travel and financial operations overseas. Key Western governments like the United Kingdom and Australia had already placed Hezbollah's military wing on its proscribed list. Only the Netherlands had banned its political wing; France, Germany, and the EU as a whole had abstained from both. This was evidence of the legitimacy Hezbollah's "national" status gained it, not within Lebanon, but among potential external opponents.

Hezbollah's offensive against the political system largely reversed its domestic setbacks since February 2005. On November 15, 2006, the UN Secretary General submitted his report on negotiations with the Lebanese government to form a tribunal. On November 24, the President of the Security Council asked him and the Siniora government to proceed. Hezbollah's five cabinet ministers and its one allied Christian minister promptly withdrew from the cabinet to try and stop the government's approval of the tribunal.[558] Targeted killings began. No sooner had the STL been requested than Pierre Gemayel, Minister of the Industry and son of the former president, was murdered.[559] These caught US attention: Bush's statement when Gemayel was killed on November 21, 2006 focused on Hezbollah's sponsors. "The United States remains fully committed to supporting Lebanon's independence and democracy in the face of attempts

[558] Henrietta Wilkins, *The Making of Lebanese Foreign Policy: Understanding the 2006 Hezbollah-Israel War* (New York: Routledge, 2013), 65.
[559] Salem, 2.

by Syria, Iran, and their allies within Lebanon to foment instability and violence," he said. He also urged action on the STL as a countermeasure: "We urge the U.N. Security Council and the Secretary-General today to take the remaining steps needed to establish the special tribunal for Lebanon that will try those accused of involvement in the assassination of former Prime Minister Hariri, and to ensure that that tribunal can also bring to justice those responsible for related assassinations, assassination attempts, and other terrorist attacks."

Alongside its assassination efforts, Hezbollah organized a large gathering of half-a-million people in December to occupy central Beirut and prevent signature of the protocol.[560] After the government signed an agreement for the Special Tribunal for Lebanon on January 23, 2007, and the agreement was sent to the parliament for ratification, Hezbollah called a general strike and low-level sectarian clashes erupted throughout Beirut, resulting in several fatalities.[561] A majority of members of the Lebanese parliament requested a Security Council resolution for a Chapter VII special tribunal on April 4. After the UN Security Council duly created the Special Tribunal for Lebanon in June, targeted killings accelerated. In July and again in September, two pro-government members of parliament – a Sunni and a Christian – were killed by bombs.

Amidst the violence and tension over the investigation, Lebanese President Lahoud finally stepped down in November 2007 when his term expired, and the political crisis became acute. The United States opposed the candidacy of General Michel Suliman, viewed as too close to Hezbollah, and Hezbollah-aligned factions refused to

[560] Wilkins, 65.
[561] Nada Bakri and Hassan Fattah, "Hezbollah Strike Brings Beirut to a Virtual Halt," *The New York Times* (January 23, 2007), http://www.nytimes.com/2007/01/23/w-orld/middleeast/23cnd-lebanon.html?_r=0 (accessed February 4, 2016).

vote on a replacement for Lahoud without a two-thirds consensus.[562] Brigadier General Francois al-Hajj, a contender for Suliman's replacement in the army's top position, was killed in December 2007.[563] A particularly effective assassination came on January 26, 2008, when Lebanese police captain Wissam Eid was killed by an explosion. Eid had been working on his own time to piece together cell phone records connecting Hezbollah members to the Hariri killing, sifting through reams of data to establish patterns. The UN investigators were sufficiently intrigued by what he had found that they asked to meet him. He was killed shortly thereafter.[564] The political stalemate was deepened by the parliament's deadlock and its inability to choose a successor to Lahoud.[565]

The combination of attacks and political movements intended to counter the March 14 coalition were hardening the US position on Hezbollah, but also on Iran, at least in the context of Lebanese domestic politics. Bush put out a blistering statement the day of the Eid killing, demanding that "Syria, Iran, and their allies end their interference in and obstruction of Lebanon's political process."[566] A few days later, on the third anniversary of Hariri's death, he put in another plug: "it is vital that the perpetrators of these attacks must be brought to justice…Syria, Iran, and their allies must end their efforts to undermine Lebanon's legitimacy government and to interfere with its political process."[567] A month later on March 24, Cheney called Iran a "darkening shadow" on

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[562] Norton, 166.
[563] "Bomb kills Lebanese general tipped for army chief," *Reuters* (December 12, 2007), http://in.reuters.com/article/idINIndia-30946520071212 (accessed November 14, 2015).
[564] https://www.nytimes.com/2015/02/15/magazine/the-hezbollah-connection.html
[565] "Hezbollah and allies resign, toppling Lebanon government," *Reuters* (January 12, 2008), http://www.reuters.com/article/us-lebanon-hariri-resignation-idUSTRE7-0B26A20110113 (accessed January 4, 2016).
[566] The White House, "Statement by the President" (January 26, 2008), https://georgewbush-whitehouse.archives.gov/news/releases/2008/01/20080126-1.html (accessed February 21, 2020).
[567] The White House, "Statement by the Press Secretary" (February 14, 2008), https://georgewbush-whitehouse.archives.gov/news/releases/2008/02/20080214-7.html (accessed February 22, 2020).

the region during a trip to Turkey. Even more than its nuclear program or its malfeasance in Iraq, he began with Lebanon, saying, "[t]he concerns that leaders in the region have for what they see happening in Iran, and what they see Iran doing in the region is perhaps not universal, but it's close to it. And that goes with everything from their support for Hezbollah, their efforts – working through the Syrians, for example, to interfere with the political process inside Lebanon..."[568] This was a change from the earlier US focus during 2005 on Iran's sponsorship of Hezbollah in the context of putting Israel under threat.

The political crisis culminated on May 9, 2008, when a general loyal to Walid Jumblatt fired an airport security official who was feeding Hezbollah information.[569] At the same time, the government began an investigation into the group's private fiber-optic communications network. In response, Hezbollah supporters poured into the streets on May 7. They invaded Sunni sections of West Beirut, taking over buildings and demanding the government cease interference with the "resistance." The traditionally neutral army did not intervene and Sunni militias in the capital were quickly overrun.[570] Fighting spread to Druze areas south of Beirut and north to the Sunni city of Tripoli. The United States blasted this effort and drew particular attention to Hezbollah's "Iranian and Syrian sponsors" which "continue to undermine Lebanon's sovereignty and democratic

[568] The White House, "Interview of the Vice President by Bret Baier, FOX News" (May 14, 2007), https://georgewbush-whitehouse.archives.gov/news/releases/2007/05/20070514.html (accessed February 24, 2020).
[569] International Crisis Group, "Lebanon: Hezbollah's Weapons Turn Inward," Middle East Briefing N°23 (May 15, 2008), 3, http://www.crisisgroup.org/~/media/Files/Middle%20East%20North%20Africa/Iraq%-20Syria%20Lebanon/Lebanon/b23_lebanon_hizbollahs_weapons_turn_inward.pdf (accessed February 2, 2016).
[570] Robert Worth and Nada Bakri, "Hezbollah Seizes Swath of Beirut From US-Backed Lebanon Government," *The New york Times* (May 10, 2008) http://www.nytimes.com/2008/05/10/world/-middleeast/10lebanon.html?_r=0 (accessed January 24, 2016)

institutions." He urged international action but tipped none: "The United States is consulting with other governments in the region and with the UN Security Council about measures that must be taken to hold those responsible for the violence in Beirut accountable."[571]

Iran's perceived tactical offensive with Hezbollah in the domestic political sphere had clearly refocused the United States. In a May 12 interview with al-Arabiya ahead of a major Iran-focused trip to the region, after Siniora was put under house arrest, Bush said "I was hopeful that Hezbollah would become patriotic, patriots to Lebanon, and not respond every time to Syrian or Iranian demands." He stressed his support for multilateral action, but explicitly refused to rule out military action. He went further during a BBC Arabic interview, saying "Hezbollah would be nothing without Iranian support, and Iranian [sic] is the crux of many of the problems in the Middle East...So a lot of my trip is going to be to get people to focus not only on Lebanon, remember Lebanon, but also to remember that Iran causes a lot of the problems around the Middle East." When Bush was pushed further, he asserted the success of democracy in Lebanon was paramount in the administration's counter-Iran strategy. "So the best way to deal with the Iranians in the Middle East is to help the young democracy of Lebanon survive," he said. Secretary Rice echoed that view of Iran's close control on May 18, 2008, describing how Hezbollah had shown that it was not a resistance movement but by attacking Lebanese, but simply "an arm of Iran." But like in 2005, it was not clear how to counter these tactical actions enabled by this more deniable support. Washington sent

[571] The White House, "Statement on the Violence in Beirut" (May 9, 2008), https://georgewbush-whitehouse.archives.gov/news/releases/2008/05/20080509-7.html (accessed February 24, 2020).

the guided missile cruiser U.S.S. Cole to the region, increased aid to the Lebanese armed forces, and loosely referenced sanctions.

The catch was that Iran's power projection elsewhere, such as Iraq and against Israel, may have made the US threat perception more acute but dulled that of others. Bush admitted these international schisms in balancing Iran before he left for the region: "The problem is, some folks just don't see the same – the threat that Iran poses in the Middle East, for example, as others do. I view them as a serious threat to peace, and therefore I spend a lot of time trying to convince other nations, other leaders to join in this common concern." In fact, the US-French alliance that had pushed 1559 through in 2004 was on its last legs. American and French views of Iran were diverging too broadly, spurred partially by US interest in stopping Iranian-made weapons from coming into Iraq and French interest in achieving a nuclear deal with Iran. France had a much different view of the viability of Hezbollah's domestic legitimacy than the US did. It had never listed Hezbollah's political wing as a terrorist organization, and had engaged the group at different levels throughout Lebanon's 19-month political stalemate. This engagement included a high-level summit in July 2007 that the US had not supported.[572]

Even US attention was not undivided amid competing regional priorities. The takeover of Gaza by Hamas in 2007 in the wake of its electoral win the previous year had helped convinced the US that the time was right for a serious push on the peace process with Fatah, the more moderate faction of the Palestinian political system.[573] This was the Administration's second real effort on an issue that had been basically stalemated since

[572] Baroudi and Salamey, 416.
[573] Condoleezza Rice, *No Higher Honor: A Memoir of My Years in Washington* (New York: Random House, 2011), 601-602.

Bush took office amidst the ongoing violence of the second intifada. Bush had made a major speech on Middle East peace in 2002 and issued a roadmap for negotiations, but much of the US effort had been focused on the slow slog of democratization and reform of the Palestinian Authority.[574] When Lebanon's political crisis reached a zenith in the fall of 2007 and spring of 2008, American attention was focused not just on the ongoing crisis in Iraq, but also on the Annapolis peace conference held in November 2007 and the follow up. It had been challenging to interest the Arab states in a conference. Syria's attendance at the conference, in particular, was something many of the other Arab states wanted as political cover. The price for Syria's attendance was including the Golan Heights (and Shebaa' farms, for Lebanon). Rice eventually accepted making reference to the other outstanding issues.[575]

There was also the ever-present issue of Iraq. Iran was increasingly equipping militants in Iraq with advanced weaponry, including explosively formed penetrators (EFPs) that could destroy US armored vehicles. Iranian-made EFPs had caused over a thousand casualties in Iraq at a tempo that peaked in the spring of 2008, and Iranian-made weapons overall had probably caused two to three times that number.[576] The US campaign was barely clawing back from the brink: amidst massive electoral losses, the Bush Administration had inserted thousands of new US forces into the country in an attempt to stem an incipient civil war, successfully, but success was fragile. In conjunction with the rising EFP toll, Iran's seizure of fifteen British servicemen in the

[574] George Bush, *Decision Points* (New York: Random House, 2010), 405.
[575] Rice, 604.
[576] Andrew Tilghman, "DoD discloses data on Iraq War deaths linked to Iran," *Military Times* (September 16, 2015), https://www.militarytimes.com/2015/09/16/dod-discloses-data-on-iraq-war-deaths-linked-to-iran/ (accessed September 19, 2020).

Persian Gulf also raised local tensions in March 2008. US defense and military officials were eager to manage escalation with Iran in Iraq, believing the US military had its hands full already.[577] The new US Secretary of Defense Bob Gates reiterated these points to those US allies most interested in balancing Iran like Saudi Arabia and Israel.[578]

On the ground, the combination of external disagreement and ineffective and distracted American tactical attention meant the die was already cast. After five days of conflict, the government of Qatar intervened to mediate. On May 21, the Doha Accord was signed by all parties. Prime Minister Fouad Siniora was forced to accept Hezbollah as a one-third partner in his cabinet, which would allow it to legally block legislation. Sulieman, the original choice for president that the US had vetoed, was elected President two days later. The government left its airport security chief in place and backed off Hezbollah's telecommunications network. Hezbollah and its allies subsequently ended their occupation of central Beirut.[579]

This was a settlement very much to Iran's liking. Tehran issued a positive statement on the agreement, though it also referenced the "remaining occupied territory of Lebanon," a reference to the Shebaa Farms area and clearly an effort to remind other states of the Israel threat to continue Hezbollah's exceptionalism in bearing arms. Iran's former opponents in Lebanon agreed. French President Nicholas Sarkozy, who in the past had stressed the need for Lebanese independence and sovereignty, celebrated the

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[577] Robert Gates, *Duty: Memoirs of a Secretary at War* (New York: Penguin Random House, 2014), 20; "News Briefing on Possible Military Action Against Iran by Admiral Mike Mullen, Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff (Excerpts)," *Iran Watch* (July 2, 2008), https://www.iranwatch.org/library/government/united-states/executive-branch/department-defense/news-briefing-possible-military-action-against-iran-admiral-mike-mullen-chairman (accessed September 21, 2020).
[578] Gates, 185.
[579] "Lebanese Parliament elects Sulieman as President," *Reuters* (May 26, 2008), http://www.reuters.com/-article/us-lebanon-president-idUSL2450102720080526 (accessed January 18, 2016).

agreement as a symbol of hope.[580] Sunni powers were quiescent: Saudi Arabia issued a supportive comment. The United States issued a terse statement, urging the agreement to benefit all Lebanese.[581]

Though dozens of people had been killed in the political unrest, Hezbollah had also achieved its desired result. Neither its aims nor its enemy's aims were any different than before the broader fight for Lebanon began in 2004. Despite the fact that Hezbollah's Iranian support hadn't changed, and indeed was by some accounts increasing, the external supporters of its March 14 opponents actually decreased their opposition to the settlement. After nineteen months of political conflict, ongoing murders, teetering on the brink of civil war, and several attempted changes to the status quo, external opposition to Hezbollah's perks and Iran's presence had cratered. And without external support to balance Hezbollah's military capabilities, the Hariri coalition would lose confrontations with Hezbollah because Hezbollah could keep its guns and perks by force. This relative irrelevance of sectarian opposition without external support was illustrated by the effort of rival factions to reduce Hezbollah's military capabilities, which presumably were necessary for its national "resistance," and their subsequent acquiescence. Walid Jumblatt, the key Druze ally of Siniora and the March 14 movement, drifted away from the March 14 camp. Sinora sought to rebuild bridges with both Assad and Hezbollah. Neither sought to force an internal crisis for another several years.

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[580] Tsilla Hershco, "Sarkozy in Syria: Discrepancies in French Mideast policy," BESA Center Perspectives Paper No. 48 (September 10, 2008), https://besacenter.org/-perspectives-papers/sarkozy-in-syria-discrepancies-in-french-mideast-policy/ (accessed September 23, 2017).
[581] The White House, "President Bush congratulates Michel Sulieman on his election as President of Lebanon" (May 25, 2008), https://georgewbush-whitehouse.archives.gov/news/releases/2008/05/-20080525.html (accessed February 25, 2020).

Simmering, 2008-2012

Iran began to reset strategically in late 2008. It had regained control over Lebanon, in the face of tremendous pressure, and ensured its continuation as a reliable launching pad. It had been defeated, for the moment, in Iraq, where the American troop surge against Sunni rebels had succeeded in bolstering moderate elements in the Iraqi government at the expense of more extreme Shia factions. The Maliki government launched a major military offensive against Moqtada al-Sadr's Mahdi Army in March 2008, neutralizing a group in which Iran had invested heavily and breaking with a key Iranian proxy. Sadr subsequently ordered it to disarm in August. A cascade of UN resolutions against Iran's nuclear program from 2006-2008 and additional US-EU sanctions accentuated Iran's economic downturn, which helped fuel domestic unrest.[582] This led to widespread demonstrations after the flawed presidential elections in 2009. After Ahmadinejad was declared the winner of disputed presidential elections in June, millions of Iranians turned out into the streets to protest and were put down by force.

Hezbollah was in a better position overall than its sponsor. Tehran increased its supply of weaponry to Hezbollah after the conflict to help replenish its arsenals, and its spending in Lebanon's south also continued at a high level.[583] There was very little international opposition to this rearmament. Individual voices sounded the alarm, especially about Hezbollah's acquisition of more advanced missiles than were used in 2006.[584] However, the increase in weapons did not translate to an increase in combat: the

[582] Shayerah Ilias, "Iran's Economic Conditions: U.S. Policy Issues," *Congressional Research Service* RL34525 (April 22, 2010), 1,4, https://fas.org/sgp/crs/mideast/RL34525.pdf (accessed July 20, 2017).
[583] Daniel Byman and Bilal Saab, "Hezbollah in a Time of Transition," *Brookings* (November 24, 2014), 4, https://www.brookings.edu/wp-content/uploads/2016/06/Hezbollah-in-a-Time-of-Transition.pdf (accessed September 19, 2017).
[584] Edith Lederer, "Israel Says Hezbollah Has 30,000 Rockets," *The Washington Post* (March 4, 2008); http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2008/03/03/AR2008030300003.html (accessed

border with Israel was quiet. Hezbollah was likewise more defensive after the resolution of Lebanon's political conflict. Its position was no longer under threat, and domestically the STL was essentially neutralized.[585] The tribunal's epitaph came when Hariri traveled to Syria to meet with Assad personally at the end of 2009 to make nice.[586] New parliamentary elections resulted in a more pro-Hezbollah government. In January 2011 the tribunal finally issued the first of its indictments. Warrants were issued to the Lebanese authorities for four Hezbollah members at the end of June: none were subsequently arrested.[587] Without another show of counter-pressure by external powers, or support of militia groups that could oppose Hezbollah, no indictments would change the facts that Hezbollah could not be arrested by force.

Iran's strategic position began to worsen further in 2011. On December 17, 2010, a Tunisian street vendor set himself on fire, sparking political demonstrations that brought revolution a month later. Similar protests swept into other US allies and partners: Egypt, Bahrain, Yemen. But in March they began in Deraa, Syria, and the security forces responded with force.[588] Protest became war, and spread to other cities like Homs. The survival of the Assad regime was of vital national interest for Iran. It was the Islamic Republic's one real ally in the Middle East, one that shared its

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September 24, 2017); Ethan Bronner, "Israel Says Syria Gave Missiles to Hezbollah," *The New York Times* (April 14, 2010), http://www.nytimes.com/2010/04/15/world/middleeast/15israel.html (accessed September 24, 2017).

[585] Interview with Judge David Baragwanath, Special Tribunal For Lebanon (June 15, 2011), http://www.specialtribunalforlebanon.com/en/q-and-a/427-what-is-the-difference-between-the-united-nations-investigative-commission-and-the-special-tribunal-for-lebanon (accessed November 12, 2015).

[586] "Supporters stunned as Hariri says Syria didn't kill his dad," *L.A. Times* (September 7, 2010), http://latimesblogs.latimes.com/babylonbeyond/2010/09-/lebanon-hariri-assassination-hezbollah-syria-iran-tribunal-bomb.html (accessed December 12, 2017).

[587] Norton, 180.

[588] Joe Sterling, "Deraa: The spark that lit the Syrian flame," *CNN* (March 1, 2012), http://www.cnn.com/-2012/03/01/world/meast/syria-crisis-beginnings/ (accessed November 12, 2015).

rejectionist approach to the peace process and was a key conduit for supplying its agents in Lebanon. Hezbollah thus shared its interest. However, Hezbollah had less diplomatic exposure than Iran, and had survived the removal of Syrian troops from Lebanon with no apparent effect on its capabilities. In addition, despite its domestic successes in Lebanon from 2008-2011, it had to be conscious of acting too much on behalf of Iran in ways that would hurt Lebanon, which would possibly reconstitute the external coalition supporting that opposition and certainly harden domestic opposition internally.

In 2012 came another strategic watershed. Hezbollah engaged in its first conventional external deployment to help defend the Syrian regime, which had begun to teeter. It was initially used as a stopgap defensive force, mostly for key Shia shrines and villages close to Lebanon's border. By mid-2012, Syrian rebels had repelled regime offensives against Homs, a center of the opposition, and were pushing towards Damascus. Four senior security officers were killed by a rebel car bomb in the middle of the city in July, and Sunni rebel groups also took control of parts of the strategic town of Qusayr and the Qalamoun mountains along the Lebanese border. Hezbollah was thrown into the defense of these areas. Its elite commando force, Unit 901, directly assisted the Syrian government defend an area around Homs in mid-2012.[589] In addition, its forces were also present in the capital, defending the Shia Sayyidah Zeinab shrine. In October, a senior Hezbollah commander was buried publicly in the Bekaa Valley, and word leaked out of Syrian opposition groups that he had been killed by IEDs south of Qusayr.[590]

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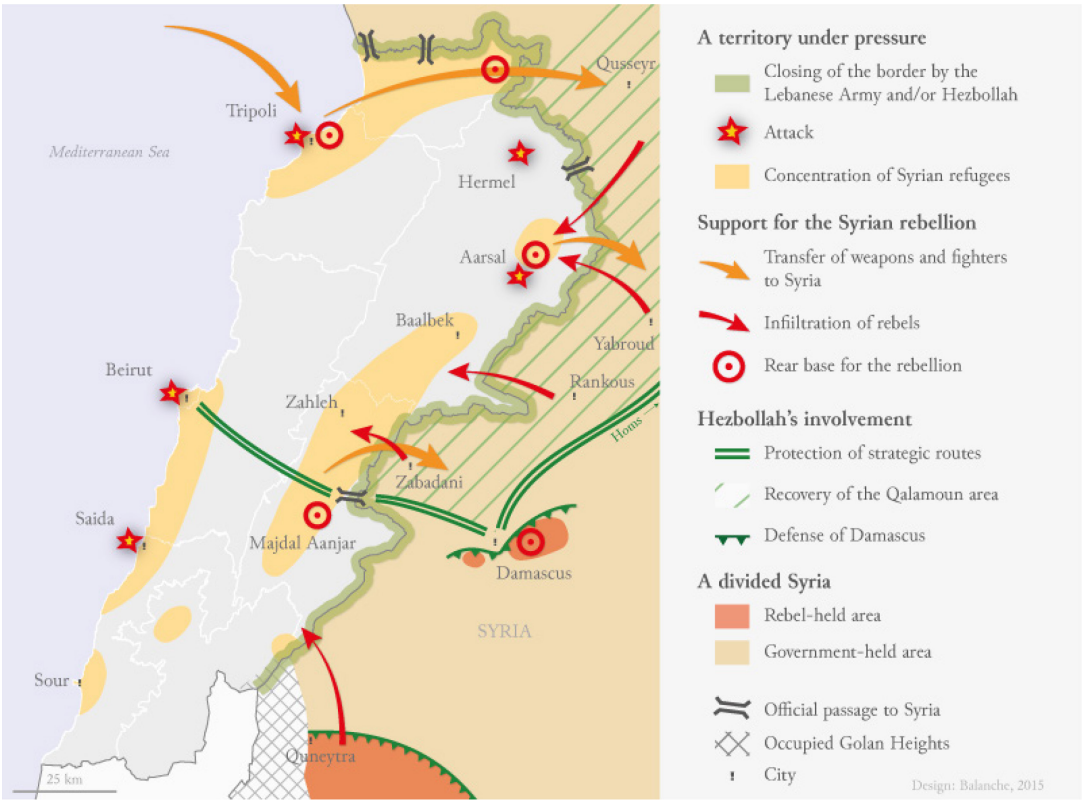
[589] Daniel Nisman and Daniel Brode, "Will Syria Bleed Hezbollah Dry?" *The New York Times* (January 30, 2013), http://www.nytimes.com/2013/01/31/opinion/global-/will-syria- bleed-hezbollah-dry.html (accessed January 25, 2016).
[590] Josh Wood, "Hezbollah Offering Direct Help to Syrian army, rebels say," *The New York Times* (October 17, 2012), http://www.nytimes.com/2012/10/18/world/mi-

Hezbollah also began to train a pro-Assad Alawite militia force, just as it had trained Iraqi militants.[591] In fact, it was performing the same function as Iranian personnel. One U.S. administration official in August 2012 said that there were "thousands of Qods Force militants in Syria who train fighters, intercept communications, and so forth – though we are unsure whether they are doing the fighting yet."[592] Hezbollah certainly was fighting – but defensively, at first.



Source: Balanche (2015), https://books.openedition.org/ifpo/docannexe/image/13210/img-2.png (accessed April 28, 2020).

ddleeast/hezbollahs-hand-seen-backing-the-syrian-army.html (accessed February 1, 2016).

[591] Daniel Benjamin and David Cohen, "Briefing on Designation of Hezbollah for Supporting the Syrian Regime," U.S. Department of State (August 10, 2012), http://www.state.gov/r/pa/prs/ps/2012/08/196335.-htm (accessed January 24, 2016).

[592] International Crisis Group, "A Precarious Balancing Act: Lebanon and the Syrian Conflict," Middle East Report N°132 (November 22, 2012), 18.

Hezbollah's deployment to Syria to prop up the regime was another indication of how much control Iran maintained over its proxy and strategically a mixed blessing. Fighting in Assad's sectarian war actually incurred costs for both parties that the use of Iran's own military did not. Because Hezbollah's effectiveness partially relied on its national patina of resistance, which affected the deniability of its Iranian support, acting as Iran's proxy in a sectarian war outside of the Israeli threat put its position at risk, regardless of the war's outcome. It reduced the group's deniability with external powers as that deployment became more visible. This would become more acute as Hezbollah's role became more offensive, putting both parties' position at risk. Second, the deployment began to pull Lebanon into the conflict. The Hariri assassination and aftermath had strained its fiction of national legitimacy, and now Hezbollah's actions were directly harming co-confessional groups. There was spillover from the fighting. The Assad regime's airstrikes and artillery fire began to hit Lebanese Sunni towns regularly in 2012, and the war ignited violence in mixed communities like Tripoli. There, two high-profile anti-Syrian Sunni leaders were killed in the summer of 2012 under mysterious circumstances, provoking deadly riots. Direct action by Sunni militants against Hezbollah and Shia targets began to become commonplace in Lebanon. These came later in 2013, after Hezbollah's role expanded.

Power Projection, 2013-Present

In June 2013, Iran decided to deepen its commitment to Syria. It new inputs included elite Qods force personnel, intelligence and training units, and broad economic

support.[593] Hezbollah's role in direct combat operations also expanded throughout the year. The first overt Hezbollah offensive in the Syrian war came in June, when the group helped retake the whole of Qusayr.[594] It was a tipping point morale-wise for the Syrian army, which had theretofore been on the end of a string of defeats, and had the strategic effect of pushing rebel fighters south and recapturing one of the major border areas near the rebel-held city of Homs.[595]

But Qusayr was also the point where Hezbollah and Iran's deniability about the group's role in Syria crumbled. The party had denied in 2011 and 2012 that its members were fighting abroad. In 2011, Nasrallah had called these accounts "absolutely untrue."[596] In the summer of 2012, Hezbollah had secretly buried members of the group killed fighting in Syria.[597] Then, in May 2013, Nasrallah gave a speech calling the Syrian conflict the group's own war. There was no more obfuscation: "This battle is ours," he said at a rally in Beirut, "and I promise you victory."[598]

This external deployment of Hezbollah in direct offensive combat led to resurrected balancing by both local actors and external powers in Europe and the Middle East.[599] Hezbollah's fiction of being a national resistance movement had again

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[593] Aram Nerguizian and Anthony Cordesman, "The Struggle for the Levant: Geopolitical Battles and the Quest for Stability," *Center for Strategic and International Studies* (September 18, 2014), 39.
[594] Marisa Sullivan, "Hezbollah in Syria: Middle East Security Report 19," *Institute for the Study of War* (April 2014), 4.
[595] International Crisis Group, "Arsal in the Crosshairs: The Predicament of a Small Lebanese Border Town," Crisis Group Middle East Briefing N°46 (February 23, 2016), 8.
[596] Nicholas Blanford, "Why Hezbollah has openly joined the Syrian fight," *The Christian Science Monitor* (June 23, 2013), https://www.csmonitor.com/World/Middle-East/2013/0623/Why-Hezbollah-has-openly-joined-the-Syrian-fight (accessed August 20, 2017).
[597] Sullivan, 12.
[598] Ali Hashem, "Nasrallah on Syria: 'This Battle Is Ours," *Al-Monitor* (May 26, 2013), http://www.al-monitor.com/pulse/originals/2013/05/nasrallah-hezbollah-syria-speech-rockets.html (accessed September 8, 2017).
[599] Ohannes Geukjian, *Lebanon After the Syrian Withdrawal: External intervention, Power-Sharing, and Political Instability* (New York: Routledge, 2016), 223.

evaporated: its involvement in an explicitly sectarian war abroad made hollow the assertation that it was a legitimate national organization. Nasrallah had first tried to finesse the issue of openly fighting other Muslims, condemning Sunni radicals like the the Islamic State of Iraq and the Taliban as "takfiris" who would harm Muslims, Christians, and the resistance.[600] But the Qusayr operation was indeed viewed by other Lebanese factions as a sectarian militia offensive. Shortly afterwards, the former Hezbollah ally and President Michel Aoun began to engage seriously with Saudi Arabia after Qusayr and nearly cut off ties with Shia speaker of parliament Nabih Berri.[601] Serving President Sulieman, likewise a former Hezbollah ally, gave a major speech calling for Hezbollah's retention of weapons to be reviewed since its forces were fighting in Syria, and called for them to leave.[602] Druze leader Walid Jumblatt likewise condemned the Qusayr operation, and Sunni Syrian rebels fired rockets into Lebanon's Shia border villages.[603] An anti-Hezbollah protest at the Iranian Embassy in Beirut was bloodily broken up by Hezbollah enforcers, leaving one dead.[604]

More militant Sunni factions from both Syria and Lebanon joined in, targeting Hezbollah militarily in a way unseen since the Lebanese civil war. Jabhat al-Nusra, an

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[600] "Nasrallah on Syria: This Battle Is Ours," *Al-Monitor* (May 26, 2013), http://ww-w.al-monitor.com/pulse/fr/originals/2013/05/nasrallah-hezbollah-syria-speech-rockets.html# (accessed February 5, 2016).
[601] Norton, 204.
[602] Ali Hashem, "Nasrallah on Syria: 'This Battle Is Ours," *Al-Monitor* (May 26, 2013), http://www.al-monitor.com/pulse/originals/2013/05/nasrallah-hezbollah-syria-speech-rockets.html (accessed September 8, 2017).
[603] "Hezbollah should keep out of Syria: Jumblatt," *Saida Online* (February 19, 2013), http://www.saidaonline.com/en/news.php?go=fullnews&newsid=44275 (accessed September 22, 2017); "Leading Lebanese Politician: Hezbollah Should Fight Israel, Not Syria Rebels," *Haaretz* (June 8, 2013), https://www.haaretz.com/middle-east-news/1.597524 (accessed September 27, 2017).
[604] Loveday Morris, "Anti-Hezbollah protestor fatally shot outside Iranian Embassy in Beirut," *The Washington Post* (June 9, 2013), https://www.washingtonpost.com/-world/middle_east/anti-hezbollah-protester-shot-dead-outside-irans-embassy-in-beirut/2013/06/09/d0cab710-d114-11e2-a73e-826d299ff459_story.html (accessed February 7, 2016).

al-Qaeda affiliated Syrian organization, threatened revenge if Hezbollah was not reined in. From May onwards, car bombings, rockets, and other attacks in Lebanon struck Shiite neighborhoods and Hezbollah positions with regularity, killing dozens.[605] Hezbollah convoys in the eastern Bekaa Valley were hit by IEDs and a pro-Assad Lebanese commentator, Mohammed Jamo, was gunned down on July 17. On July 9, a car bomb exploded in a Hezbollah stronghold in South Beirut, wounding fifty; the attack was claimed by a radical Sunni group, the Special Forces 313 Brigade.[606] Iranian targets came under particular fire. Despite increased Hezbollah and then Lebanese security force checkpoints in southern Beirut, an al-Qaeda linked group conducted a massive double suicide bombing next to the Iranian Embassy on November 19. The attack, which killed 26 people and injured 147, may have been aimed at the convoy of the Iranian cultural attaché, who was killed in the blast.[607] As sectarian violence increased in Lebanon, Nasrallah implicitly promised to sacrifice his position in Lebanon for Syria. "If the battle with these takfiri terrorists requires that I and all Hezbollah should go to Syria," he said, "We will go."[608]

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[605] For example, Anne Barnard, "Funeral Turnout Shows Lebanon's Ebbing Morale," *The New York Times* (December 29, 2013), http://www.nytimes.com/2013/12/30/world/middle-east/funeral-turnout-shows-lebanons-ebbing-morale.html (accessed February 10, 2016).

[606] International Crisis Group, CrisisWatch Database (August 1, 2013), http://www.crisisgroup.org/en-/publication-type/crisiswatch/crisiswatch-databas-e.aspx?Coun-tryIDs=%7bB88F968D-7344-46FF-B440-9B24224EB6ED%7d#results (accessed February 5, 2016); "Beirut suicide blasts raise tensions in Lebanon as Sunni militants target Iran," *The Guardian* (November 19, 2013), http://www.theguardian.com/world-/2013/-nov/19/beirut-bombings-iran-embassy-sectarian-tensions-lebanon (accessed February 6, 2016);

[607] "Beirut suicide blasts raise tensions in Lebanon as Sunni militants target Iran," *The Guardian* (November 19, 2013), http://www.theguardian.com/world/2013/-nov/19/beirut-bombings-iran-embassy-sectarian-tensions-lebanon (accessed February 6, 2016); International Crisis Group, "Lebanon's Hezbollah turns Eastward to Syria," Crisis Group Middle East Briefing N°153 (May 27, 2014), 5.

[608] Stephen Kalin and Mariam Karouny, "Defiant Hezbollah leader says ready to fight in Syria," *Reuters* (August 16, 2013), http://www.reuters.com/article/us-lebanon-explosion-idUSBRE97E0S520130816?-feedType=RSS&feedName=topNews (accessed February 8, 2016).

Hezbollah's continuing visibility and participation in non-Lebanese war abroad increased anti-Hezbollah action internationally. Only a month after the Qusayr intervention, the European Union finally listed Hezbollah's military wing as a terrorist group.[609] This was not entirely due to its deployment in Syria, since it had been involved in two terrorist plots in Europe the year before. However, its history of external terrorism was nothing new: Hezbollah had been implicated in dozens of plots in Europe over its existence. The new element was its overt effort to project Iranian power abroad. And indeed, when EU High Representative Catherine Ashton spoke about the designation after a foreign ministers meeting on July 22, she made no reference to the Bulgaria attack. Rather, she stressed the Syrian conflict, and added that, "due to concerns over the role of Hezbollah, we have agreed to designate its military wing on the list of terrorist designations.[610]

The offensive at Qusayr also impacted United States policy. The administration of President Obama had previously not stressed Lebanon in its Iran strategy, which focused on Iran's nuclear program. Its early détente with Bashar Assad and the appointment of the first post-Hariri US ambassador to Damascus had also mitigated against trying to resurrect the former coalition supporting the March 14 group. But that changed after Qusayr. Obama mentioned Hezbollah for the first time in the Syrian context on May 3, 2013, but only in terms of preventing it from getting chemical

[609] Justyna Pawlak and Adrian Croft, "EU adds Hezbollah's military wing to terrorism list," *Reuters* (July 22, 2013), https://www.reuters.com/article/us-eu-hezbollah/eu-adds-hezbollahs-military-wing-to-terrorism-list-idUSBRE96K0DA20130722 (accessed September 10, 2017).
[610] Delegation of the European Union to Turkey, "Remarks by EU High Representative Catherine Ashton Following the Foreign Affairs Council" (June 23, 2013), https://www.avrupa.info.tr/en/news/remarks-eu-high-representative-catherine-ashton-following-foreign-affairs-council-2061 (accessed June 20, 2020).

weapons.[611] It was not until June 11, 2013 that the White House specifically began to call out the role of Hezbollah and Iran. Administration spokesman Jay Carney cited "concerns about the involvement of Hezbollah and Iran about the fighting in Syria on behalf of Bashar al-Assad" amid "great concern" on behalf of the President for the situation overall.[612] The administration went further on July 15, 2013 as it developed a plan for arming the Syrian rebels. Carney tied this to the Hezbollah and Iranian intervention in Syria, saying "we are in daily contact with the Syrian Military Council to discuss how we can support their needs…the President believes very strongly, as he made clear, that our updated assistance to Syria is essential to helping buttress the opposition as it endures this vicious assault from Bashar al-Assad that is supported – in a manner that speaks volumes about who he is and who his friends are – by Hezbollah and Iran."[613] He returned to this theme three days later, saying "we are coordinating with our allies and partners and the opposition to help buttress and strengthen the opposition as they endure a withering assault by Bashar al-Assad and his forces, aided by Hezbollah and Iran," and again on July 23, referring to the "brutal assault" by "Assad with the support of Hezbollah and Iran."

The policy of the former Arab backers of the March 14 coalition was likewise changed by the Qusayr operation. After the offensive, the GCC nations initiated an economic and political boycott of Hezbollah, a stark contrast to their resigned acceptance

[611] The White House, "Remarks by President Obama and President Chincilla of Costa Rica in a Joint Press Conference" (May 3, 2013), https://obamawhitehouse.archives.gov/the-press-office/2013/05/03/remarks-president-obama-and-president-chinchilla-costa-rica-joint-press (accessed February 27, 2020).
[612] The White House, "Press Briefing by Press Secretary Jay Carney" (June 11, 2013), https://obamawhitehouse.archives.gov/the-press-office/2013/06/11/press-briefing-press-secretary-jay-carney-6112013 (accessed February 24, 2020).
[613] The White House, "Press Briefing by Press Secretary Jay Carney" (July 15, 2013), https://obamawhitehouse.archives.gov/the-press-office/2013/07/15/press-briefing-press-secretary-jay-carney-7152013 (accessed February 26, 2020).

at the time of the Doha agreement. States like the UAE and even Qatar extradited known Hezbollah members and supporters from their territory.[614] In December 2013, Saudi Arabia, long a supporter of Lebanon's Sunni community, pledged $3 billion to the reformist-controlled army, almost certainly to support the government against Hezbollah. The money was the largest single Sunni aid pledge to Lebanon in history and would almost triple Lebanon's annual $1.7 billion defense budget.[615] This decision would be followed by Saudi Arabia designating Hezbollah a terrorist organization in March 2014. The GCC and then the Arab League did likewise in March 2016.

Coincidental with these designations came renewed Sunni engagement to contest Iranian influence in Syria militarily. This was part of a broader rebalancing by the Sunni world against Assad. Both Qatar and Turkey also emerged as key supporters of Sunni rebels. Turkey radically reversed its Syria policy of previous years and allowed Arab rebel groups to develop supply lines for recruits and weapons through its border with Syria, and Qatar served as a key fundraising hub for Sunni groups. With Turkish aid, Sunni extremist groups had established themselves in northwest Syria by early 2014.[616] These included both Western-supported groups like the Free Syrian Army, Saudi-supported groups like Ahrar al-Sham, and the most extreme Salafist organizations. Other Sunni states joined in. Dozens of non-governmental clerics in Saudi Arabia called for a jihad against Iran and Assad in Syria in October 2015, and in December, the Saudi

[614] Norton, 203.
[615] Ellen Knickmeyer and Maria Abi-Habib, "Saudis Pledge $3 Billion to Support Lebanon's Army," *The Wall Street Journal* (December 29, 2013), http://www.wsj.com/articles/SB10001-424052702304361604579288430866-906254 (accessed February 11, 2016).
[616] Nerguizian and Cordesman, 154.

Minister of Defense announced a 34-nation military alliance of Sunni-majority countries. The following February Saudi Arabia offered to send its own troops to fight in Syria.

For a variety of reasons, this pushback against Hezbollah and Iran did not become decisive. Two in particular stand out: President Barack Obama's walking back of his red line against chemical weapons and the rise of ISIS. The Syrian government launched a massive chemical weapons attack in the Damascus suburb of Ghouta on August 21, crossing a stated threshold for US military action.[617] After a tense stalemate, Obama backed down and permitted a third party to examine and remove some of the weapons. The United States' campaign against Syria declined thereafter. Obama had never been excited about arming the Syrian rebels and his administration slow-rolled weapons supplies, which never materialized in strategic quantities.[618] The administration's subsequent aggressive pursuit of a nuclear accord with Iran precluded an aggressive posture against Iranian interests elsewhere, though no strategic collateral from the nuclear deal was alleged.[619] And indeed Obama himself, when the nuclear deal was reached, acknowledged that some more resources might be available with which Iran could arm Hezbollah (and others) with, but judged it an acceptable tradeoff.[620]

Perhaps more definitively, the rise of ISIS also created an urgent political need more acute than the campaign against Assad and Iran's interests. In August 2014 the US

[617] "Final Report," United Nations Mission to Investigate Allegations of the Use of Chemical Weapons in the Syrian Arab Republic, A/68/663-S/2013/735 (December 13, 2013), http://undocs.org/A/68/663 (accessed August 15, 2017).
[618] David E. Sanger, Eric Schmitt, and Ben Hubbard, "Trump Ends Covert Aid to Syrian Rebels Trying to Topple Assad," *The New York Times* (July 19, 2017), https://www.nytimes.com/2017/07/19/world/-middleeast/cia-arming-syrian-rebels.html (accessed August 18, 2017).
[619] For example, Nicole Gaouette, "Lawmakers press Obama officials on Iran nuclear deal," *CNN* (May 25, 2016), http://www.cnn.com/2016/05/25/politics/iran-us-nuclear-deal-implementation/index.html (accessed September 4, 2017).
[620] The White House, "Press Conference by the President" (July 15, 2015), https://obamawhitehouse.-archives.gov/the-press-office/2015/07/15/press-conference-president (accessed February 28, 2020).

intervened against the Islamic State to protect besieged Yazidis, and deployed several thousand military forces to Iraq to retrain the Iraqi army later in the year. However, a campaign against ISIS essentially precluded one against Assad, since the two were some of the largest landowners in Syria. After the Islamic State claimed credit for a spectacular terrorist attack in Paris in 2015, Secretary of State John Kerry dropped his insistence that Assad step down prior to a political transition, in effect conceding that the Syrian military campaign of regime change had come to an end. The US did not even contest Russia's intervention on behalf of Assad that September, the first time in history Russian military force had been allowed to operate freely in the Middle East. After the fall of rebel-held Aleppo in 2016, the new Trump administration pulled the plug on aid to the remaining Syrian Arab rebels.

III. Conclusion and Additional Analysis

Despite the opposition its proxies and strategic policy faced, Iran achieved its goals in Syria. Hezbollah's operational effectiveness, even in more and more overt roles, helped to swing the conflict to Bashar Assad. In the process, however, both Iran and Hezbollah incurred major costs. Iran entered 2017 isolated in the region, with an unprecedented Sunni military alliance opposing both it and Hezbollah. The US campaign against ISIS and pursuit of a nuclear deal offset some of the strategic costs it incurred. However, these costs would reemerge and be exacerbated over the next three years through the Trump Administration's "maximum pressure" campaign, which was initiated (and the nuclear deal abandoned) in no small part as a result of Iran's actions in the Syrian war.

How did Iran's ideology affect use of its proxy? First, it helped define the Islamic Republic's strategic goals after the revolution. From a basically secular state founded on Persian nationalism, the new government in Iran redefined its interests to include pockets of its outlying co-religionists. It then set about alleviating some of their humanitarian concerns but also building them into strategic weapons as powerful proxy groups, nowhere more so than with Hezbollah. Second, Shia religious institutions could help funnel money to charitable projects in Lebanon and elsewhere, obviating the need and the cost of creating them from whole cloth. This effect was similar to Pakistan; by the time of America's Afghan, war many of Pakistan's religious institutions had also been receiving state funding and supporting Pakistan's objectives in Afghanistan for three decades with significantly built out operational pathways. Iran was slightly more of a newcomer to Lebanon, though some of the new IRGC had been involved in Shia activism there before. The disappearance of Musa Sadr provided a convenient vacuum of Shia leadership exactly when Iran needed it, but his political organizational work meant that the new Hezbollah could easily adopt many of Amal's activated members and functions. Lastly, the ideological goals that had been grafted on to Hezbollah probably helped keep the group focused on the goals of revolutionary Shiism as Iran defined them, irrespective of Hezbollah's domestic position, without day-to-day Iranian control. However, without tracking the direct communications between Iran and Hezbollah, this would be difficult to prove. How much, in other words, did Hezbollah redefine its interests to match changes in Iran's interests? The answer is closely, if not totally. But did Hezbollah adopt those changes as the result of strategic instructions or some kind of inference of what Iran's Supreme Leader Ali Khameini, the scholars in Qom, and the religious apparat in

Tehran were saying? Probably the former. Ultimately that answer is unknowable, however, because Iran is the only source of revolutionary vilayet-e faqih doctrine and as such the interests of Khameini as head of state and Khameini as supreme religious authority are basically identical. Hezbollah's entry into the Syrian war, on religious pretexts to start with but then with increasingly strategic objectives is one indication of how the two motivations were usually indistinguishable.

For its part, Hezbollah was hurt by its deployment to Syria. It did maintain an important supply route and patron. But by 2016, it had suffered an estimated 700-1,000 casualties, approximately one-eighth of its force on the ground.[621] That deployment also shattered its national legitimacy, both domestically and internationally. Hezbollah was not wholly an Iranian foreign legion, nor simply a branch of the IRGC: its reliance on domestic legitimacy to feed its deniability for its Iranian support meant that as its actions deviated away from those that conceivably benefited Lebanon, it would pay the price for that support and its unique, lawless armed status. And it did. With its external combat deployment, it was more clearly an agent of power projection by the Iranians and more clearly an instrument of interstate war. The designation of Hezbollah as a terrorist organization by two key entities – the EU and Saudi Arabia, to be followed later by Germany and the United Kingdom – was an indicator of the increased ease of balancing against the group. The Syria action resurrected the international coalition that had successfully backed the March 14 alliance in 2005. It also had internal effects. Internal balancing came from Sunni and Christian politicians, sectarian groups, and militant

[621] Dan De Luce. "Syrian war takes rising toll on Hezbollah." *Foreign Policy* (July 9, 2015). http://foreign-policy.com/2015/07/09/syrian-war-takes-rising-toll-on-hezbollah (accessed October 20, 2015).

strikes against Hezbollah targets. These attacks frayed the domestic consensus Hezbollah had forcibly achieved in 2008.

But it did help win the Syrian war, to be fair. Overall, Hezbollah was an incredibly effective tool for Iran to project power, both due to the operational capabilities it provided and the multiple ways in which it mitigated international consequences for supplying those capabilities. During the course of three decades, it became Iran's key agent of influence with both conventional and unconventional capacities. Iran's model of support to Hezbollah – controlling its strategic decisions, arming the group, but mostly avoiding tactical involvement – was effective. There was a degree of separation with Iran. Iranians did not serve in the Hezbollah leadership ranks, nor dictate tactical or operational actions, nor usually take part in direct combat. The massive amount of weaponry Iran sent its proxy gave it effective tactical capabilities, and robust ones, with rearmament coming quickly and easily. These weapons were usually not terribly advanced. The anti-tank weapons and rockets Hezbollah used so effectively in the 2006 war incurred no qualitatively different strategic blowback as did Russia's provision of anti-air weapons to the Ukrainian separatists. This style of operational support helped the group mitigate strategic balancing. The quick ejection of Syrian troops from the country in 2005 and the subsequent lack of real alteration to Lebanon's policy orientation was a clear indication of how valuable the more deniable Iranian support was compared to (for example) the Syrian troop presence, which was mostly a liability. Moreover, on those occasions when more advanced weapons were used, or when a new capability was being tested (like the *Hanit* missile attack or the early embassy bombings) Iran's hands were

more closely involved. This brought a certain risk mitigation to Hezbollah's fighting capabilities, despite the closer support.

The causal mechanism in this case study worked mostly as this dissertation's model would predict: more decisive counterbalancing came when Hezbollah's support became less deniable. That was when the group began to be treated as the outlier it was: the sole remaining Lebanese militia under arms, in violation of multiple UN Security Council resolutions and the Taif accord. This was most evident with the removal of Syrian troops in the country in 2005 and the operation at Qusayr in 2013 – the least deniable, most overt modes of proxy support. The 2006 war also had the effect of focusing international attention from Syria as a sponsor of Hezbollah to Iran, though the practical effect of the war was to weaken opposition to those links. In addition, Hezbollah's offensive against the March 14 coalition in 2008 aroused tremendous US opposition to Iran, though the international opposition had mostly splintered by then. So why did it splinter?

The answer to this and to Hezbollah's broader deniability was the two wars it waged at once. One was against Israel and one was against all opposing Lebanese factions. Waging the former reduced international opposition to waging the latter and for receiving support for doing so. As time progressed, this effect became integral to justifying both Iran's presence in Lebanon and Hezbollah's armed exceptionalism. The degree to which this effect was pronounced – the degree to which Hezbollah could make this argument – was also fueled by its domestic legitimacy. That legitimacy was boosted by how organically rooted in the population the group was. Hezbollah's creation of a

political party, the expansive social services it offered (and Iran paid for), and its joining the Lebanese government all served to tie its own identity closer to the nation's.

This was the key effect of all Hezbollah's social services: not that they reconciled other Lebanese factions to it, because they did not. Rather, they fed into Hezbollah's ability to portray itself as a legitimate national resistance. That legitimacy increased Iranian deniability: in other words, it lessened the extent to which Iranian support to Hezbollah would be balanced either internally or – much more critically – externally by outside powers. Hezbollah aroused the least opposition when it could claim to be acting on behalf of the Lebanese nation, either through social work or upholding interstate territorial integrity.

The deniability that resulted did three things. First, it reduced somewhat the hostility from other sectarian factions, though this effect may have been minimal. In this dynamic, anti-Israel operations played the same role domestically that anti-American ones did for Iran. They were a way to consolidate Hezbollah's internal support, quiet its sectarian enemies, and mask itself in the nation; as well as achieve local objectives. Second, it offered additional and national-level assets to Hezbollah's military effectiveness, such as the use of government radars during the 2006 war. The group was more lethal when it could take advantage of Lebanon's national capabilities like its airports and its telecommunications systems.

Third, and most importantly, it allowed Hezbollah and Iran to mitigate the penalties for interstate aggression. Hezbollah's effort to maintain that it was a legitimate part of Lebanon's national military system made it more difficult for potential balancers to contest it as an agent of Iranian influence. It shattered the cohesiveness of those

balancers and potential supporters of Hezbollah's rival factions. European nations in particular were reluctant to sanction a group that had the trappings of national legitimacy, including political representation. They were often unwilling to sanction Hezbollah when it engaged, again nominally on behalf of Lebanon, in interstate warfare against Israel or received Iranian weapons to do the same. Sunni nations felt compelled to praise Hezbollah's operations, which often represented rare Arab victories, or at least condemn Israeli mistakes. It helped, of course, that the legitimacy of Israel's existence and actions was such a contested issue among many European publics as well.

Without the war against Israel, and the group's accompanying "resistance" narrative enabling Iranian deniability, the group was just as vulnerable as any other agent of Iranian influence. The critical moments when this fiction was exposed – when external powers took action against Hezbollah – were when it shed its deniability as a national resistance organization. These included Assad's intervention in Lahoud's succession, the murder of Rafiq Hariri and (in particular) Hezbollah's offensive at Qusayr, when both Iran and Hezbollah came under intense pressure despite being successful tactically.

This explains why Hezbollah was so insistent on thwarting the Hariri tribunal. The Hariri investigation and special tribunal were dangerous for Hezbollah because they were a codified attack against its domestic legitimacy, which enabled its Iranian support and special status under arms under arms. Without external support Lebanon's other factions were outgunned. Thus, the STL's explicit documentation of Hezbollah's role in conducting a war internal to Lebanon would reduce its legitimacy not among other confessional groups, who were on the receiving end of that war, but externally, among

potential enemy sponsors, and potentially cause them to re-coalesce. However, the international response to the Hariri investigation as a matter of power politics stalled after the July War. It never truly moved beyond the least deniable target: the presence of Syrian troops in Lebanon. Unfortunately, and perhaps as a surprise to all parties, those troops were not critical to Lebanon's strategic orientation.

There is also a question about whether these successes were the result of Iran's deniability or other exogenous factors. Iranian policy in Lebanon benefited from being probably America's fourth priority in the region, at best, behind Iraq, Iran's nuclear program, and at times the peace process. Sometimes it could rise to third. Perhaps what was ascribed to deniability was simply the result of a great power struggling under two wars, trying to manage escalation with the Iranians and cajole the Syrians, alongside sometimes unhelpful allies convinced that at least half its misery the United States had brought upon itself. And that is fair, except for international opposition pivoted around a few clear data points – and opposition changed, usually, when deniability changed. First, the removal of Syrian forces from Lebanon did little to alter Lebanon's strategic orientation during a period in early 2005 where US and Western priorities were mostly held constant. The West had squared off against the Syrian presence in Lebanon and Syria's troops had left. There was little consensus about continuing the campaign against Iran and the IRGC, though they were the ones holding the line on Hezbollah, which had actually killed Hariri. This spoke to the comparative effectiveness of more deniable support. Second, Hezbollah's move against Qusayr changed US and EU actions towards Hezbollah and the Syrian conflict in a way that upset decades of precedence, particularly for the Europeans. Third, the collapse in opposition to a Hezbollah-dominated Lebanese

government really began in 2006, after the July War, when the peace process had not yet gathered steam and before the Iranian campaign in Iraq had reached its peak lethality. This pointed to a correlation between balancing and the signature dynamics of the Israel-Hezbollah-Lebanon triangle, which could effectively minimize balancing against Iranian aid. Certainly, there were many pressing priorities in the Middle East for the United States and Europeans, but the sequential correlation pointed to something else.

And there were other factors that affected the effectiveness of Hezbollah. Early on, the external acceptance of the Taif accord despite noncompliance by Hezbollah weakened the normative power of diplomatic measures. This was baked into the Lebanese system by the events of 2005. The problem was not that Taif codified the presence of foreign troops or militias in Lebanon: in fact, its key provisions called for the disbanding and disarmament of all militia groups and the extension of governmental authority throughout the country.[622] However, the deal's backers had no ability to enforce that edict on Hezbollah, which quickly said it would retain the necessary capabilities for resistance against Israel. Inasmuch as Hezbollah's capabilities depended on Iranian support, the IRGC would stay as well. And there the matter lay; Hezbollah's armed status became the status quo. Functionally, the settlement had the effect of taking the power of diplomatic mechanisms off the table by creating a norm by which they ignored violations of the deal. Instead of reflecting the status quo as it existed – that Hezbollah would remain armed – it posited a different future its backers were unable to achieve. By doing so, it made those provisions worse than unenforceable: by being unenforceable, they normalized the very thing they sought to reverse. This hurt the

[622] "The Taif Agreement," *United Nations Treat Series* (1991), https://www.un.int/lebanon/sites/www.un.int/files/Lebanon/the_taif_agreement_english_version_.pdf (accessed August 25, 2015).

ability of UN resolutions in the future that also called for the disarmament of militias. Once Taif had been ignored, at least the part about Hezbollah giving up its arms, then UN resolutions like UNSC 1559 and 1701 could be as well with fewer consequences, even despite the addition of more peacekeeping troops to the border.

Thirdly, the more clearly defined conflict boundary between Lebanon and Israel after 2000 led to Hezbollah relying on more advanced weapons and complex attacks to conduct military operations. Both the introduction and the use of these weapons attracted attention. This had the effect of reducing Iran's deniability, since these capabilities were an ongoing reminder of state involvement. Nowhere was this more evident than in the attack against the *Hanit*, which gave Israel the opportunity to point to state involvement. Though rockets were quieter in some ways, their use was also noisy in terms of balancing. Unless used in response to a direct attack or the apocryphal rules of the road, Hezbollah's rockets could clearly be identified as aggressive acts. When compared to the ability Iran had to pressure Israel in southern Lebanon during its 18-year military presence, the solidification of the border and Israel's withdraw posed challenges to retaining maintaining a deniable level of combat. However, this could of course also work to the group's advantage. Given sufficient pretext for the initiation or continuation of conflict, long-range rockets allowed Hezbollah to maintain a clear propaganda narrative of inimitability.

This reaction to Hariri's killing and the later political confrontation in 2008 also suggested the importance of changes in regime to deniability. Even though it was the political landowner in Lebanon, Syria was trying to change the institutional status quo after a long period of stasis. The requested change in the constitution for Lahoud was the

catalyst: had Assad not attempted to brazenly alter Lebanon's institutions, or had he nominated another, equally quiescent candidate for president, the international reaction might have been much less, as indeed it was later during Lebanon's 2007-2008 political gridlock. The March 8 coalition played it just as thuggishly in May 2008 as in February 2005. But May 2008 came at the end of a long period of political abdication and unrest. The country was already locked in a political stalemate over the UN investigation, which was compounded by Lahoud stepping down. The armed takeover of Beirut in 2008 aroused far less opprobrium internationally than had the murder of Hariri. That was partially a result of strategic changes, but also suggested that key elements of the system were fluid and up for grabs in 2008 in a way they were not in 2005. Stability was cumulative. Nowhere was this more apparent than in the muted, even occasionally enthusiastic international reactions to the Doha settlement. Exhaustion and relief prevailed among many internal and external actors, particularly relief that the civil war would not return. This, despite the fact that Doha essentially cancelled out all the political gains the March 14 coalition had made in Lebanon over the past three years.

And lastly, the strategic orientation of Iran mattered. Whether Iran's and Hezbollah's goals were offensive or defensive mattered in terms of the balancing they experienced. Overall, Iran usually incurred the least blowback and consequences for its proxy support when it was on the defensive. The most visible sign of this was during the 2006 war, when Israel's unexpected attack into Lebanon did much to mute much of the external opposition to the supply and resupply of weapons to Hezbollah. Though Israel was clearly responding to Hezbollah's raid, the scale of the response – and the progression of the war to include ground troops – eventually began to cast it as the

aggressor, especially after the events at Qana. This effect was also evident during the Qusayr operation, when Hezbollah experienced unprecedented opposition internationally. By comparison, its operations in 2012, basically defensive in nature, aroused much less blowback either domestically or internationally. This does not, of course, rule out that the cumulative effect of Hezbollah's involvement in Lebanon contributed to the eventual balancing effects. Hezbollah's offensive push in Lebanon politically from 2006-2008 also accentuated the effect of focusing US policy on its supporters. It also helped shift that focus from Syria to Iran as the key problematic sponsor preventing Lebanese democracy from flourishing. This transition was reflected in US statements, though European states were slow to follow. This was likely due to different strategic perceptions of Iran, particularly in the context of the Iraq war, and lingering fallout from the July war. To Iran's benefit, those were never clearly resolved.

CHAPTER FIVE: PAKISTAN AND THE HAQQANI NETWORK, 2001-2016

Pakistan has rarely been at peace. In the seventy years since its independence, it has fought three major wars with India, come close to a fourth, and consistently supported insurgents fighting for the disputed territory of Kashmir. Its strategy was one of many smaller states confronting a larger neighbor: a focus on additional territory, alternate weapons, asymmetric tools. After the loss of East Pakistan in 1971, the importance of its neighbor Afghanistan increased. In Afghanistan, Pakistani national security leaders developed and supported cadres of Islamist militants, including a family militia known as the Haqqani network. This chapter analyzes how Pakistan used the Haqqani network to project power inside Afghanistan. It assesses Pakistan's founding ideology and doctrine, the support structure of the Haqqani network, the Haqqanis' effectiveness in achieving Pakistan's goals in the context of the overall insurgency, and examines key moments from 2001 to 2016 when Pakistan's power projection was challenged. This chapter also identifies several other factors that contributed to Pakistan's strategic success, such as the contested border known as the Durand Line, the structure of policymaking in Pakistan, and its control over the main supply route to Western forces in Afghanistan.

The distinctive feature of Pakistan's proxy warfare was its two-track system of support to the kaleidoscope of militants fighting in Afghanistan. This framework had its roots in the regime of General Zia ul-Haq and the outbreak of the Soviet-Afghan war two years later in 1979. During that conflict, there was direct support to the mujahedin from the Pakistani military's Inter-Services Intelligence (ISI) and other government bodies. But support was also given to militants indirectly through private religious groups, charities, and madrassas, which had seen their funding greatly expand under Zia. This

form of support was more deniable than the ISI's direct support because the state could keep an even greater distance from the actual militants fighting. The resulting base of militancy would eventually aid most of the groups of the Afghan Taliban, including the Haqqani network and the broader Quetta Shura Taliban, replenishing and sustaining their ranks after the American invasion in 2001. But there was a secondary effect: it also aided militants who took aim at Pakistan. The increased deniability of this type of aid increased the recipients' agency: as they became stronger, they were more able to pursue other goals in defiance of the state sponsor. Pakistan faced operational and political constraints in confronting them, including several costly counterinsurgency campaigns in its border regions and terrorism in its largest cities. This was the cost of more indirect support of militancy, incurred over decades and made acute by the US-led war on terror. Mitigating these costs, rather than power projection on the battlefield, was the Haqqani network's main value.

The Haqqanis are the focus of this chapter because they were the major group with which Pakistan had the closest relationship and their effect on US actions and Pakistani strategic goals should thus be the easiest to measure. The Haqqani network benefited from the looser base of militancy that Pakistan had supported over decades, but also received direct Pakistani operational support. This aided the group in conducting high-visibility attacks against Western targets, including the US Embassy in Kabul. As a weapon, this proved to be a liability: the deterioration of the US-Pakistani relationship correlated closely with the number and frequency of Haqqani attacks. The more the Haqqani network showed its face, the more likely US consequences against Pakistan became, incurring strategic costs without achieving comparable strategic gains.

I. Origins

The partition of India, when it came in 1947, was cruel to the new state of Pakistan. It faced perhaps the most complex nation-building challenge imaginable, with millions of refugees, a built-in adversary three times as large, and a fragmented population bifurcated by a thousand miles of that adversary's territory. In forging this state the unclear role of Islam in public life, problems of internal cohesion, and themes of relative weakness haunted Pakistan and would continue to do so throughout its existence. For the military, this fomented a strategic focus on both power projection, to push the separatism away from Pakistan's borders, and asymmetric war, to keep Pakistan's stronger neighbor off-balance without inciting a major conflict.

The five major ethnic groups of Pakistan were united by a common religion and vastly disunited in most other things, including language, economic wellbeing, and political representation. Mohammed Ali Jinnah, the head of the Muslim League and recognized founder of Pakistan, had viewed Islam as the symbol that would hold the two halves of the new state together. In practice, even the role of Islam was uncertain. In Jinnah's view, the state was a home for Muslims, but would not be ruled by Islamic legal coda. Religious minorities were still tolerated and supposedly empowered in the state, exemplified by the white stripe on the national flag. But in the view of other politicians and religious parties like Jamiaat-e Islami (JI), this was not enough. Islam had to be more of a ruling legal principle, with a society based on sharia law and civil servants and other state representatives bound by their piety.[623] This vagueness was by design, allowing

[623] Syed Vali Reza Nasr, *The Vanguard of the Islamic Revolution: The Jama'at-I Islami of Pakistan* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1994), 106-114.

Jinnah to unite Muslims without alienating potential opponents.[624] However, it eventually helped exacerbate the same centrifugal tendencies it was meant to counter.

These tendencies were significant. India had inherited the structures of colonial governance from the British, including the civil administration and the colonial army, and possessed a well-developed body politic. Pakistan was left with the vestiges of a viceregal system and provinces in which political development was far less advanced.[625] The state's governing bodies like the civil service were fragmentary, with only a tiny percentage of pre-Partition officials choosing to join Pakistan.[626] The army was not only also fragmentary but vastly unequal. It consisted of less than three percent Bengalis in at the time of partition, despite being Bengalis being the new majority of the new Pakistani population, and was more than three-fourths Punjabis.[627] Exacerbating the challenges, Pakistan's founders established a system of centralized decisionmaking which left little room for an ethnic autonomy that might well have lessened the tension between different groups, particularly the Bengalis, who believed they had been promised at least a share of self-governance.[628] This centralization was evident in measures like the law mandating Urdu as the national language of Pakistan, despite being the first language of only a tiny minority of Pakistanis. The language law caused riots soon after independence, stoking Bengali unrest and discontentment with the central government.[629]

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[624] Stephen Cohen, *The Idea of Pakistan* (Washington, DC: Brookings Institute Press, 2004), 29.
[625] Christophe Jaffrelot, "India and Pakistan: Interpreting the Divergence of Two Political Trajectories," *Cambridge Review of International Affairs* 15, no. 2 (2002): 253.
[626] Cohen (2004), 41.
[627] Aqil Shah, *The Army and Democracy: Military Politics in Pakistan* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2014), 15.
[628] Shah, 14.
[629] Hasan Rizvi, *Military, State, and Society in Pakistan* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 2000), 78, 129.

For this new state, theoretical problems about identity and formation were secondary to the immediate problem of India and Pakistan's comparative weakness. Jinnah believed that India would never accept Pakistan and viewed his state's creation as a temporary dismemberment from the Indian whole.[630] Pakistani military officers then and later believed that India was intent on not only remaining the dominant power in South Asia but on also dismembering its neighbor, including through backing secessionist tendencies in Pakistan.[631] Fear of a Hindu India and sense of injustice was magnified by the sudden horrors of the partition, the treatment of the princely states by India, and the delay in receiving military supplies from the Indians. These beliefs were inculcated not just into this first generation of senior military officers but also the institutions they created, preserving them in the military's culture.[632]

To meet this challenge, materiel was lacking. Pakistan had inherited only a fraction of the British Indian Army's equipment and less of the colonial government's money. There had not been an all-Muslim battalion in the British Indian Army for nearly a century since being eliminated after the Indian Rebellion in 1857.[633] That meant that Pakistan had no bespoke full-strength units. Nearly half of the available units were located in India at the time of partition, and many Muslims elected to remain there.[634] There were few Pakistani senior officers led by only one major-general amidst an overall officer shortage.[635] This especially included specialist officers, like engineers and

[630] Shah, 12.
[631] Shah, 207.
[632] Cohen, 101.
[633] Christine Fair, *Fighting to the End: The Pakistan Army's Way of War* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2014), 57-58.
[634] Fair (2014) 58).
[635] Rizvi, 60; Fair (2014), 49, 58.

medical personnel, and those with staff experience.[636] The new army was viewed as amateurish, improvised, making up with enthusiasm what it lacked in expertise and materiel.[637]

The combination of state heterogeneity, a focus on India, and relative weakness affected Pakistani doctrine and military operations. It led to a desire to project instability outwards, to take the fight to India and its allies before they could further encourage separatism in Balochistan and elsewhere.[638] Asymmetric warfare and the support of proxy militants became a key part of this view. The use of proxy groups in places like Kashmir and later Afghanistan was justified by the threat Pakistani military leaders saw from India and its disproportionate strength.[639] It was compounded by American influence in the late 1950's, as wars of national liberation occupied more and more US interest and the military relationship between the two nations deepened.[640] Ironically, it was also perceptions of American perfidy that then deepened Pakistan's reliance on asymmetric warfare.[641] The acquisition of nuclear weapons by each actor and their potential equalizing effect later reinforced Pakistan's interest in asymmetric war, since both states sought lower-intensity measures to punish each other.[642]

The unrest that broke out in the Muslim-majority province of Jammu and Kashmir in 1947 seemed a partial remedy to these interlocking problems of strategy, national cohesion, and identity. If Pakistan was a home for Muslims then it should have Kashmir.

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[636] Fair (2014), 58.
[637] Shah, 33.
[638] Shah, 207-208.
[639] Daniel Markey, *No Exit From Pakistan: America's Tortured Relationship with Islamabad* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2013), 39; Paul Kapur and Sumit Ganguly, "The Jihad Paradox: Pakistan and Islamist Militancy in South Asia," *International Security* 37, no. 1 (Summer 2012), 115.
[640] Cohen, 104.
[641] Markey, 86.
[642] Markey, 46.

Mobilizing to fight for Kashmir against India should also help reinforce the state's reason for being and increase cohesion. And additionally, the territory of Kashmir would provide some crucial strategic depth against Pakistan's much larger neighbor. As an ongoing foreign policy objective, fighting for control of Kashmir could thus serve ideological, and political ends, and strategic ends.[643]

Kashmir also provided an opening for the politicization of the new military. Partially this was due to the use of the army as a tool and a symbol to unite the new parts of the state. But it was also due to the military's independent role in national security policymaking, which would increase almost continuously under both civilian and military governments. In 1947, the shortage of officers meant that senior positions were held by British officers, not Pakistani ones. This inverted the chain of command, providing a political opening for independent action by subordinates. Pakistani field-grade officers like Akbar Khan, director of weapons and equipment at Rawalpindi for the new army, were able to take independent action with or without the tacit support of political leaders but not senior officers. Khan initiated a largely independent scheme to arm Kashmiri insurgents as well as outside irregular forces to assist them, with approval but not direction from a few senior leaders.[644] As a result of the Pakistani army's military weakness, Khan sought to encourage the unrest brewing in Kashmir and either annex the province for Pakistan or stave off a coercive Indian move as in the princely states of Junagadh and later Hyderabad.

Pakistan began infiltrating Afridi tribesmen and other irregular forces into the province in September 1947, and helped these irregulars turn the civil unrest into an

[643] Kapur and Ganguly, 117-118.
[644] Fair, 49.

insurgency. It supplied food, communications, and weapons to the militants, but did not yet commit regular troops. Pakistani leaders made sure to keep their aid to these forces highly circumspect, going around their British army chief to work directly with their own officers in the fight. By early October Kashmir faced a widespread insurgency, which was bolstered later in the month by external attacks from Pakistan-backed irregulars. The local authorities requested Indian military aid, which was promptly airlifted into Kashmir and succeeded in quelling the revolt. Despite the Pakistani army's intervention in April 1948, the conflict was essentially stalemated until the final ceasefire, leaving one-third of the province under Pakistani control and two-thirds under Indian. The irregular forces and tactics used to start the 1947 war were codified into doctrine for the Pakistani military and used to sustain low-level guerilla attacks in peacetime and irregulars in war.[645] These early events contributed to the Pakistani army's habit of political action. This included policymaking and independent action by subordinate officers, to say nothing of conducting a coup.

By the time of the second war in 1965, Pakistan's asymmetric warfare tactics and support mechanisms to the irregulars were more sophisticated. There was unity of command, for one thing. The head of the Pakistani military, Ayub Khan, had overthrown Pakistan's civilian leadership in a coup and no longer had to subvert the military bureaucracy to conduct operations. Akbar Khan, who had led the Kashmiri irregulars in the first war, had tried to launch a coup of his own in 1951 and had been imprisoned. In early 1965, Pakistan began to recruit irregular forces, provided them with a six-week training course, and inserted them into Kashmir in larger and larger numbers. These

[645] Kapur and Galguly, 119-120.

forces were divided into eight units and fell under divisional leadership, which assigned their attacks to specific sectors.[646] Unfortunately for Pakistan, local residents alerted provincial authorities to the infiltration and India managed to seal off its part of Kashmir, quelling the possibility of instigating a broader revolt. General war broke out at the beginning of September when the Pakistani regular army intervened in Kashmir. After successfully containing the attack, India escalated the conflict by crossing into Pakistani territory further south before fighting bogged down and a ceasefire was negotiated by the Soviet Union and United States.

The last of Pakistan's great wars was a different affair but had a strategically more important outcome, by reinforcing Pakistan's use of asymmetric warfare and Islam. It was largely a conventional conflict, at least on Pakistan's part, and a crushing failure in the east, where the Bengalis were finally separated into their own state. The 1971 war was a humiliation for the military, which had failed to both prevent Bengali separatism as well as defend Pakistan proper in the West, several thousand square kilometers of which were occupied by India. The humiliation of the army meant the end of military rule after nearly two decades and a return to civilian government, this time under the Pakistani People's Party leader Zulfiqar Ali Bhutto.

Ironically, it was under the more secular Bhutto that the role of Islam began to change and occupy far more of national life than it had in the past. Secularists had managed to finesse the constitutions created in 1956 and 1962 to retain much of Jinnah's vision for Islam in Pakistan, but by the 1970's that was shifting.[647] The passive role of Islam had failed to unite the disparate pieces of Pakistan in the face of linguistic

[646] Kapur and Galguly, 120.
[647] Jaffelot, 440.

differences and thus had to be accentuated.[648] Islam was declared the state religion of Pakistan under the new constitution in 1973. The Ahmadi minority was officially declared non-Muslim, tightening the orthodoxy permitted by the state. This was by changes to the legal, tax, and educational systems.[649] The army assumed a new, more Islamic slogan.[650] This also meant an increase in Pakistan's reliance on militant proxies abroad, and in particular Islamist militants in Afghanistan.[651] One of these proxies was the Haqqani family.

The Haqqanis had their roots in an area of Afghanistan called Loya Paktia, consisting of the three provinces Paktika, Paktia, and Khost. It was mountainous land, and by tradition only loosely governed from Kabul. Loya Paktia jutted out from Afghanistan into Pakistan's Federally Administered Tribal Areas, or FATA, where Islamabad's authority ran loose and which since the colonial era had been unruly and ridden by banditry. Its outer border denoted part of the Durand Line, the disputed 1,650-mile colonial border with Afghanistan that Kabul had since the partition of India refused to acknowledge. It cut through the Pashtun heartland, dividing Afghanistan's south from Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (KPK) and Balochistan. This dispute helped erode attempts to control the passage of persons, since lines of authority were contested and unclear. If lines of authority were unclear, acts of aggression were more difficult to identify. If acts of aggression were more difficult to identify, the international reaction to them would be muted and likely delayed. These areas were also riven by common ethnic, tribal, and

[648] Kapur and Ganguly, 122.
[649] Christophe Jaffrelot, *The Pakistan Paradox: Instability and Resilience* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2015), 478.
[650] Markey, 49.
[651] Kapur and Ganguly, 122.

family bonds between Pashtuns that crisscrossed disputed territory and formed networks that were powers unto themselves. One of these was the Zadran tribe, comprised of Pashtuns residing in Pakistan's North and South Waziristan and concentrated in nine districts across Afghanistan's Loya Paktia.

Source: Institute for the Study of War

Jalaluddin Haqqani, patriarch of the sprawling family network that bore his name, rose to prominence and Pakistan's attention in the years of Daoud Khan, who ruled Afghanistan before the Soviet invasion. He attended seminary school at the Dar ul-Ulum Haqqaniya madrassah in what was then called Pakistan's North-West Frontier Province and later KPK. Like many other proto-militants, he was involved in Islamist political circles through Pakistani religious parties like Jamiat Ulama-e Islam (JUI) that were

active in supporting frontier madrassahs at the time.[652] After graduation, Jalaluddin worked for Mawlana Abdel Haq in his successful campaign for a seat in Pakistan's parliament as a member of JUI. After teaching briefly at the Haqqaniyya madrassah, he returned to Afghanistan and opened a school of his own in a town called Nika, in Paktika province.[653] He was there on July 17, 1973 when former Prime Minister Mohammed Daoud Khan seized power in Afghanistan, deposed his cousin the king, and declared himself president of a new republic. Pakistan viewed Daoud Khan as a direct threat to its integrity; he was an aggressive Pashtun nationalist and outspoken about supporting Pashtun autonomy or independence within Pakistan. More troubling for religious Afghans, Khan was a committed leftist, one who included communists in his government and deepened relations with the Soviet Union.[654]

Partially as a result, Pakistan under Bhutto began to support militants and members of Afghanistan's Islamic opposition. These included Bernahuddin Rabbani, Gilbuddin Hekmatyar, and Haqqani himself. The Pakistani army began to train several thousand Islamist guerillas in 1973 and 1974, as well as pay anti-Khan activists through organs like the Frontier Constabulary.[655] Haqqani claimed that he attempted to launch an uprising against the Khan regime immediately; in any case, at some point between 1973 and 1975, he moved his primary base across the border to North Waziristan in Pakistan.[656] Haqqani's first battle against the Afghan government came in Urgun

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[652] Jason Burke, *Al-Qaeda: The True Story of Radical Islam* (New York: I.B. Taurus & Co. Ltd., 2003), 168.
[653] Vahid Brown and Don Rassler, *Fountainhead of Jihad: the Haqqani Nexus, 1973-2012* (Gurgaon, India: Hachette India, 2013), 42.
[654] Husain Haqqani, *Pakistan: Between Mosque and Military* (Washington, DC: Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, 2005), 170.
[655] Imtiaz Gul, *The Most Dangerous Place: Pakistan's Lawless Frontier* (New York: Viking, 2010), 2-3.
[656] Brown and Rassler, 46.

District, in Paktika, coinciding with an unsuccessful coup led by Islamists in Kabul. After the government cracked down, Haqqani retreated to Peshawar to regroup with other Islamists.[657] However, Daoud Khan stepped back from the brink. Afghanistan ratcheted back its calls for a Pashtun homeland, and Pakistan in turn reduced its support for the rebels, who squabbled among themselves. Some returned to Afghanistan to fight intermittently on their own.[658] Relations between Pakistan and its neighbor warmed, as did those between Khan and the United States.

Two events brought a halt to this rapprochement and restarted Pakistan's support for proxies in Afghanistan. First, Pakistan's own prime minister Zulfiqar Bhutto was overthrown in 1977 by General Zia ul-Haq, a man who believed strongly in an Islamist identity for his country. Second, the warming relationship between Kabul and Washington eventually so alarmed the Soviet Union that it backed his removal in a left-wing coup in 1978. Support for the Afghan rebels came roaring back with a vengeance, particularly once the Soviet Union intervened militarily in Afghanistan on behalf of the new government. Those family and tribal ties between Pashtuns began to be strengthened and overlaid by a new network: Pakistani money, advisors, and other forms of state support.

During the war, Haqqani became an integral element in Pakistan's overall proxy campaign and began to receive significant amounts of direct aid. Overall, this aid tended to favor Pashtun leaders such as Hekmatyar rather than Tajiks.[659] The Pakistanis also rewarded success on the battlefield, and both as a Pashtun and a capable commander

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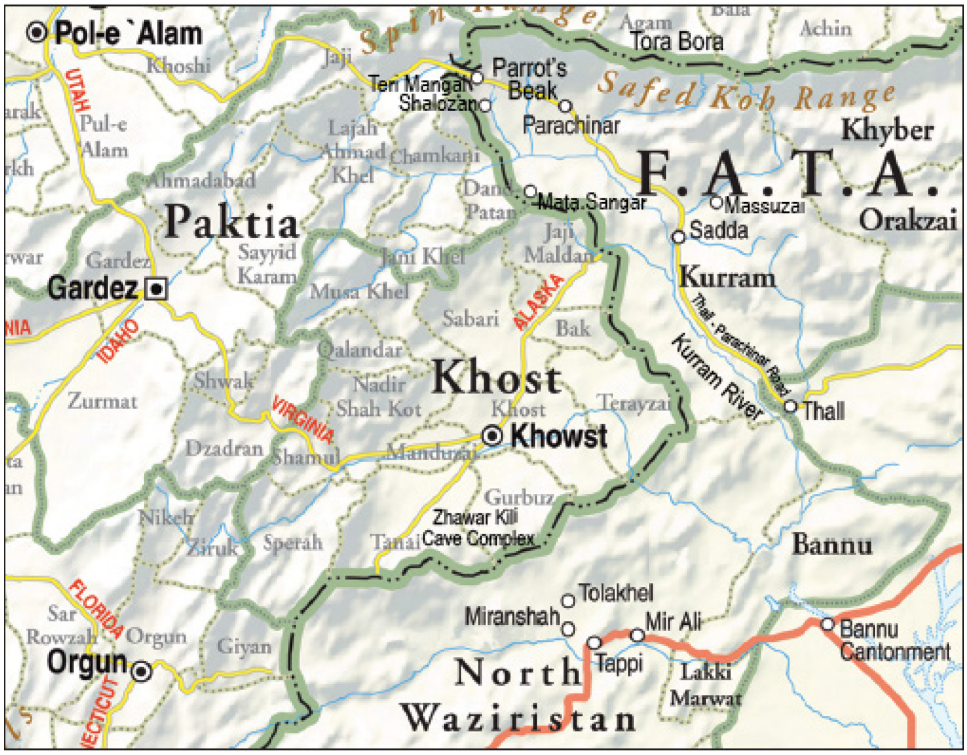
[657] Brown and Rassler, 48.
[658] Steve Coll, *Ghost Wars: The Secret History of the CIA, Afghanistan, and Bin Laden, From the Soviet Invasion to September 10, 2001* (New York: Penguin Press, 2004), 114.
[659] Coll (2001), 119.

Haqqani profited.[660] Beginning in 1981, he constructed a major military and training complex across the border at a town called Zhawar in Khost Province, with the financial and logistical help of the ISI.[661] The Zhawar base, and indeed his entire operating area in Loya Paktiya, lay along one of the main transit routes between Afghanistan and Pakistan. Soviet and Afghan government forces launched three separate assaults against Zhawar; the size of the third one allegedly forced a Pakistani commando unit to intervene across the border.[662] One ISI general estimated that as much as 60 percent of supplies to the mujahedin went through Khost and Paktiya, and one-third through Zhawar itself.[663]



Source: Jeffrey Dressler and Reza Jan, "The Haqqani Network in Korram Agency: The Regional Implications of a Growing Agency," *AEI Critical Threats* (May 2011), 8.

[660] Brown and Rassler, 54.
[661] Bruce Riedel, *What We Won: America's Secret War in Afghanistan, 1979-89* (Washington, DC: Brookings, 2014), 52.
[662] Lester Grau, "Battle for Hill 3234: Last Ditch Defense in the Mountains of Afghanistan," *The Journal of Slavic Military Studies* 24 (June 2011): 219, 224.
[663] Riedel, 52.

In addition to direct support for the insurgents, Pakistan began to funnel significant amounts of money to Islamist organizations, part of Zia's drive to Islamicize his country.[664] This effort constituted the basis for the second part of Pakistan's modern two-track proxy doctrine. Zia instituted measures like the *zakat* tax, in which the government appropriated 2.5 percent of most Pakistanis' savings during Ramadan. Much of this money went to madrassahs, religious schools which offered religious education as well as room and board for poor students. The number of religious schools in Pakistan began to grow rapidly during this time, particularly in Pashtun areas along the frontier.[665] At the country's founding in 1947, there had been 137 madrassahs in the territory of modern Pakistan. That number grew to 908 in 1971, 2,861 in 1988, and 5,500 less than a decade later.[666] Critically, this growth came with a decline in religious education in Afghanistan proper during the 1980's. More and more Afghans were sending their children to madrassahs in Pakistan, rather than at home. This increased the importance of clerical influence over their students, since usually the students were cut off from family networks. It also gave clerics a much more supranational network of students and potential militants, blending *talibs* from all over Afghanistan together with those from refugee camps in Pakistan.[667] It also exposed those students to the themes of the Islam coming from Pakistan, which were increasingly militant. As a madrassah complex owner and an Islamist, Haqqani also benefited from these religious policies of Zia's

[664] Tahir Andrabi, Jishnu Das, Asim Ijaz Khwaja, and Tristan Zajonic, "Religious School Enrollment in Pakistan: A Look at the Data," John F. Kennedy School of Government Working Paper, no. RWP05-024 (December 2005): 2.
[665] Peter Singer, *Pakistan's Madrassahs: Ensuring a System of Education not Jihad*, Brookings, Analysis Paper #14, (November 2001): 1.
[666] Ali Riaz, *Faithful Education: Madrassahs in South Asia* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 2008), 92.
[667] Antonio Giustozzi, *Koran, Kalashnikov, and Laptop: The Neo-Taliban Insurgency in Afghanistan, 2002-2007* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2007), 44.

government. The increase in Pakistani funding for *zakat* projects under Zia helped him build upward of eighty schools on both sides of the Durand line, with the largest being Manba al-Ulum near Miram Shah in North Waziristan.[668]

The funding going through mosques and madrassahs also reinforced increasingly militant themes, invoking the ideas and capabilities of the Afghan insurgency. These institutions were already ideologically strict, with madrassahs of the conservative Deobandi school of Islamic jurisprudence supported by JUI and predominating in Pakistan's border regions.[669] But with the war and this building boom came "Kalashnikov culture," a glorification of jihad and an expanding private-sector base of support for Islamic radicalism.[670] In addition to their religious education, many schools also distributed books, magazines, and DVDs of militant groups like Jaish-e Mohammed praising jihad and promoting armed conflict. Others went further and trained their students in the use of weapons.[671] Militancy and battlefield successes, in turn, made these institutions and their owners more financially independent. The most well-known fighters – including Haqqani himself – developed funding sources from governments and wealthy donors in the Persian Gulf, and even received American money directly, without the intercession of Pakistani middlemen.[672] This put them further outside the government's control.

These policies of Zia created a dangerous weapon. Over time the state would face both a political and functional capability gap in confronting militants when their goals

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[668] Brown and Rassler, 55.
[669] Riaz, 81.
[670] Joshua White, *Pakistan's Islamist Frontier: Islamic Politics and U.S. Policy in Pakistan's North-West Frontier* (Arlington, VA: Center on Faith &International Affairs, 2008), 32.
[671] Singer, 3.
[672] Steve Coll, *The Bin Ladens: An Arabian Family in the American Century*, (New York, NY: Penguin Press, 2008), 294.

and those of the state diverged. Pakistan's government would repeatedly shy away from attempts to directly address the radical themes that bled into its domestic media, schools, religious institutions, and politics, reflecting how sensitive these ideas were but also how helpful such institutions could be.[673] Religious parties and madrassah associations such as Wafaq al-Madris al-Arabia actively worked to stifle any reform. This contributed to inertia at the enforcement level and a lackadaisical policy approach to investigating madrassah links to terrorism. Pakistani police often made little effort to crack down even on the institutions or clerics praising domestic militants.[674] Pakistan's national security apparatus, which benefited from schools producing militants like Lashkar-e Jhangvi, showed little interest in allowing major trials of radicals who were viewed as helpful to the state.[675] Mainstream Pakistani politicians felt free to visit and campaign with the leadership of officially proscribed militant groups for decades after the Soviet war.[676]

The deepening of relations with jihadist proxies was not confined to Afghanistan, but also included militants in places like Kashmir. The years of the Afghan war saw an increase in the Pakistani army's instrumental support for Kashmiri insurgents, which helped exacerbate a revolt that broke out in 1988.[677] In the decade afterwards this continued, but the aid was funneled to increasingly Islamist groups and then on to more

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[673] International Crisis Group, *Revisiting Counterterrorism Strategies in Pakistan: Opportunities and Pitfalls*, Asia Report N°271, (July 22, 2015): 12, http://www.crisisgroup.org/~/media/Files/asia/so-uth-asia/pakistan/271-revisiting-counter-terrorism-strategies-in-pakistan-opportunities-and-pitfalls.pdf (accessed May 28, 2016).
[674] International Crisis Group (2015): 15.
[675] For example, "There is no reason to arrest Maulana Abdul Aziz: Interior Minister," *The News Tribe* (December 18, 2015), http://www.thenewstribe.com/2015/12/18/there-is-no-reason-to-arrest-to-arrest-maulana-abdul-aziz-interior-minister/ (accessed June 25, 2016).
[676] Ayesha Nasir, "Punjab Turns a Blind Eye as Militant Scourge Thrives," *The National* (March 5, 2010), http://www.thenational.ae/news/world/asia-pacific/punjab-turns-a-blind-eye-as-militant-scourge-thrives (accessed June 17, 2016).
[677] Kapur and Ganguly, 125-126.

radical non-Kashmiris, who were less concerned with civilian casualties. In the early 1990's, the ISI shifted its support from secular, independence-minded groups to the Islamist Hizb ul-Mujahideen (HUM), which was supported politically by JI. HUM became the preeminent group in Kashmir and attacks on Indian forces skyrocketed.[678] In the mid-1990's Pakistan pushed further, believing that HUM was still too politically moderate. The ISI began to patronize the most violent jihadist groups, like Lashkar-e Taiba (LET) and Jaish-e Mohammed (JEM). Both LET and JEM were proscribed after a major attack on the Indian parliament, but continued to operate relatively freely and meet with Pakistani politicians.[679] And active or passive, the jihad was spreading further than Kashmir. For example, the Uzbek government condemned Pakistan after the war for allegedly training Uzbek militants like the Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan, which had spread to Afghanistan and the FATA.[680]

The relative autonomy of many of these groups meant that other means were necessary for the state to control its radicals, such as mediators and informal managers of the radical community. As Russian forces withdrew from Afghanistan Haqqani began to act as a key mediator between militants, a role that would become more critical in the future. He had feet on many sides of the aisle: he had, for example, been one of the only Afghan mujahedin leaders who openly recruited and aided foreign fighters such as Bin Laden and other Arabs.[681] Pakistan, with the support of the United States and Saudi Arabia, placed Haqqani at the lead of an effort to mediate a power-sharing arrangement

[678] Kapur and Ganguly, 127.
[679] Kapur and Ganguly, 128.
[680] Olivier Roy, "The Taliban: A Strategic Tool for Pakistan," in *Pakistan: Nationalism Without a Nation*, ed. Christophe Jaffrelot (New York: Zed Books Ltd, 2002), 156.
[681] Coll (2008), 294.

among the mujahedin commanders, though its primary battlefield proxy in the immediate interwar period was the hardline Islamist Gilbuddin Hekmatyar.[682] Haqqani's role continued to focus on reconciling the disparate mujahedin parties during Hekmatyar's devastating siege of Kabul in 1992 and the emergence of the Taliban movement in 1994.[683] After Hekmatyar's star dimmed, Pakistan would gradually shift its support to the Taliban. Beginning as a Kandahar-based anti-warlord movement, the Taliban spread to the west and northeast, eventually reaching the Loya Paktiya region. There, too, the Haqqanis were diplomatic. At the prompting of Pakistan's ISI, Haqqani joined the Taliban in 1995, receiving financial and political autonomy in exchange for assisting with the capture of Kabul in 1995 and Mazar-e Sharif in 1996.[684]

Compared to the military's involvement, Pakistan's civilian government had only loose influence over the Taliban and other Islamist militants during these years. In Kashmir, this presented the absurd spectacle of Nawaz Sharif signing a goodwill accord with India in February 1999 in an attempt to reduce his international isolation, while the military had already begun to smuggle irregular forces into Kashmir to precipitate the Kargil crisis two months earlier.[685] In Afghanistan, the Haqqanis continued to harbor Islamist rebels wanted by the US government, including al-Qaeda and other militants like Harakat ul-Ansar.[686] Particularly after al-Qaeda's US Embassy bombings and Osama bin

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[682] Mohammed Kakar, *Afghanistan: The Soviet Invasion and the Afghan Response, 1979-1982* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1995), 268.
[683] Kakar, 284.
[684] Thomas Ruttig, "The Haqqani Network as an Autonomous Entity," in *Decoding the New Taliban: Insights from the Afghan Field*, ed. Antonio Giustazzi (New York: Columbia University Press, 2009), 65; Brown and Rassler, 104-105.
[685] Roy, 179.
[686] U.S. Department of State, *Harakut ul-Ansar activities in Pakistan*, Cable Karachi 001617 (Karachi, Pakistan, March 29, 1995) 7, 9, http://nsarchive.gwu.edu/NSAEBB/NSAEBB389/docs/1995-03-29%20-%20Karachi%20HUA%2-0and%20Haqqani.pdf (accessed June 24, 2016).

Laden's declaration of war against the US, Pakistani Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif's administration came under intense US pressure to compel the Taliban to extradite bin Laden. That pressure continued after the civilian and military branches of the Pakistani government were united by force in 1999 under General Pervez Musharraf. It proved fruitless; al-Qaeda and a number of Pakistani insurgents remained in Loya Paktia until the end of the regime.[687]

That end came with the terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001, which brought the United States into Afghanistan and forced Pakistan to alter its ties to the Taliban. When it became clear an invasion was imminent, Pakistani leaders asked for time to negotiate with Mullah Omar over the surrender of bin Laden. At the same time, however, ISI director Lieutenant-General Mahmoud Ahmad then traveled to Afghanistan and reportedly urged Omar not to buckle to the Americans.[688] Whether Omar needed the encouragement or not, he did not buckle. Unfortunately for him, the success of the initial American campaign was extraordinarily rapid. The United States inserted paramilitary forces into Afghanistan on September 26 and began bombing the country eleven days later on October 7.[689] Northern Alliance forces led by Atta Muhammed Nur and Abdul Rashid Dostum took Mazar-e Sharif on November 10 and Kabul fell on November 13. On December 6, senior Taliban officials led by Mullah Omar abandoned Kandahar and eventually left the country.[690] US and Northern Alliance representatives met with Jalaluddin Haqqani to discuss reconciliation but no deal was struck.[691] That was

[687] Brown and Rassler, 117.
[688] Ahmed Rashid, *Descent into Chaos: The United States and the Failure of Nation Building in Pakistan, Afghanistan, and Central Asia* (New York: Viking, 2008), 77.
[689] Seth Jones, *In the Graveyard of Empires: America's War in Afghanistan* (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, Inc., 2010), 90.
[690] Jones, 94.
[691] Brown and Rassler, 122.

unfortunate. Many of the foreign fighters in Afghanistan were hiding in a cave complex called Tora Bora, in the eastern province of Nangarhar. Focused on maintaining a light footprint, the US allowed local Afghan forces to lead the effort to encircle these militants. Many of them subsequently escaped over the border into Pakistan, and many of those eventually trickled into the Haqqani stronghold of North Waziristan.[692]

II: The Conflict

Recovery, 2001-2006

Pakistan's key objectives in Afghanistan remained consistent from the beginning of the American invasion. Above all, Pakistan sought to prevent the country from emerging as an Indian ally, which could place it in a precarious strategic situation. Second, it wanted to maintain a positive military and economic relationship with the United States. Third, it wanted to prevent chaos emerging, as had happened in the 1990's. Fourth, it desired a friendly, deniable area to train militants like the  , mostly for use in Kashmir. Lastly, it wanted to degrade Afghanistan's ability to foment separatism in its ethnically Pashtun areas.[693]

These goals suggested a strategy that would offer sufficient cooperation with the US to preserve bilateral relations while providing enough support to insurgent elements to ensure Pakistan retained a veto over the strategic alignment of any future Afghanistan. Pakistan helped the United States conduct counterterrorism operations against the remainder of the al-Qaeda network. But it also provided varying degrees of support to

[692] Jones, 97-98.
[693] Larry Hanauer and Peter Chalk, *India and Pakistan's Strategies in Afghanistan: Implications for the United States and the Region* (Santa Monica: Rand Corporation, 2012), 25-27.

the Afghan Taliban, which was useful as a proxy to ensure that veto. This support was essentially twofold. Pakistan combined benign neglect of the Quetta Shura Taliban and its associated militants with more direct support to the Haqqanis. This strategy achieved a high degree of deniability with the "regular" Afghan Taliban, which had a baseline degree of operational competence, while less deniability but more high-end operational capability and tactical responsiveness with the Haqqanis.

The Haqqani network received the most support of any Afghan proxy from Pakistan's military and intelligence institutions, including active operational assistance, weapons, and funding that increased its battlefield capabilities. This relationship was a category of its own. After the American invasion, Haqqani's group retreated to its core area around Miram Shah and the Shawal Valley, in North Waziristan. During discussions with Jalaluddin Haqqani in the aftermath, Pakistani officers urged him to fight back against the Americans. In February of 2003, the Miram Shah Shura was inaugurated as the locus of the Haqqanis jihad efforts against the Americans.[694] Throughout the war, Haqqani would consistently rely far more heavily on financing from Pakistan than other branches of the Taliban.[695] Pakistani officers also allegedly helped Haqqani rebuild his training facilities on their side of the border in North Waziristan.[696] They subsequently provided operational expenses for the complex, high profile attacks that would become a trademark of Haqqani operations. For example, Pakistani ISI officers reportedly sent the Haqqanis motorbikes for use in suicide attacks.[697] Militants

[694] Antonio Giustazzi, *The Taliban at War: 2001-2018* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2019), 31.
[695] Giustazzi (2019), 226.
[696] Brown and Rassler, 174.
[697] Afghan War Logs: Clandestine aid for Taliban bears Pakistan's fingerprints, *The Guardian* (July 25, 2010) https://www.theguardian.com/world/2010/jul/25/pakistan-isi-accused-taliban-afghanistan (accessed June 22, 2016).

were equipped out near the frontier and then sent across the Afghan-Pakistan border.[698] More complicated attacks, such as the devastating bombing later of a CIA base in Khost Province in coordination with al-Qaeda, were also reportedly funded and supported operationally by Pakistani officers.[699]

This and other types of direct support made the Haqqani network a highly capable element of the Afghan insurgency. This was aided by the centralization of command, sometimes down to the tactical level, which differed from other Afghan Taliban factions like the Quetta Shura.[700] Indeed, the enhanced operational capabilities the group developed prompted some to refer to it as the special operations wing of the Taliban. That was not its formal function in the insurgency, but it is true that the Haqqanis conducted complex operations (particularly suicide attacks) throughout the country.[701] Kabul, in particular. The Haqqani network conducted the majority of the violence in Kabul, and nearly all of the spectacular attacks. It kept its facilitation networks – its safe houses, its staging areas, its arms dumps – separate from other Taliban factions.[702] Coincidental with affinity for high-profile attacks was that the Haqqani network retained its ties to al-Qaeda, even as most of the other Taliban factions shed them. These ties were not just a source of honor resulting from long personal ties and Pakhtunwali, but a two-way street of operational support.[703]

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[698] Brown and Rassler, 180.
[699] "Pakistan dismisses claims of ties to 2009 suicide bombers targeting CIA officers," *The Guardian* (April 15, 2016), http://www.theguardian.com/world/2016/apr/15/afghanistan-chapman-bombing-pakis-tani-ties-cia-us-claims (accessed May 28, 2016).
[700] Giustazzi (2019), 35.
[701] Jeffrey Dressler, "The Haqqani Network: A Strategic Threat," *Institute for the Study of War* Afghanistan Report 9 (March 2012): 11.
[702] Giustazzi (2019), 87.
[703] Don Rassler and Vahid Brown, "The Haqqani Nexus and the Evolution of al-Qa'ida," *Combatting Terrorism Center at West* Point (2011), 11-12, 41-42.

This was the distinctive nature of Haqqani support from Pakistan. Other Pakistani support was more passive, similar to its support for the Quetta Shura Taliban, which through most of the American period served as the political umbrella group for the insurgency. The Quetta Shura's leadership was primarily comprised of the senior members of the deposed Taliban government, most importantly Mullah Mohammed Omar, which relocated to Quetta in 2002. Omar retained the overall allegiance of all insurgent factions, despite periods of tension and of migrating power centers, and national-strategic decisions about the war remained in Quetta.

This passive support from Pakistan was visible in three ways. First, there was the state's toleration of the leadership's presence in Quetta, the same as Miram Shah, and the logistical and operational nodes it maintained around itself. Pakistani security officials allegedly kept reporters and other members of the public away from Taliban leaders and their base areas around Quetta.[704] Pakistani military and intelligence officers also passed on warnings of suspected raids by American forces to select Afghan Taliban leaders, including the Haqqanis.[705] They soft-peddled their own raids on Taliban facilities, often waiting for a politically convenient time like a high-level US-Pakistan meeting to execute the operation and capturing few unimportant personnel.[706] Second was permissiveness about cross-border interdiction. The state permitted Taliban leaders and fighters to cross the border freely in their area.[707] These were nearly impossible to verify by Afghan or

[704] Giustazzi (2007), 24.
[705] Jeffrey Dressler, "The Haqqani Network: from Afghanistan to Pakistan," *Institute for Study of War*, Afghanistan Report 6, (October 2010): 14; "U.S. official: Pakistan still tips off militants," *CBS News* (June 18, 2001), http://www.cbsnews.-com/news/us-official-pakistan-still-tips-off-militants/ (accessed June 11, 2016).
[706] Riaz Khan, "Pakistan Army Destroys Al-Qaeda Hide-out," *Associated Press* (September 13, 2005), http://www.freerepublic.com/focus/f-news/1483677/posts (accessed June 15, 2016).
[707] Giustazzi (2007), 24.

American forces. Deniability was also enabled by Pakistan's historically loose control over the FATA.[708] This was a theme Musharraf would return to over and over during friendly meetings with President Bush. At Camp David in June 2003, for example, he stressed that Pakistan had not controlled the FATA for over a century, while accepting Bush's praise of his leadership and cooperation.[709] Pakistani forces also reportedly assisted militants in crossing the Afghan border to conduct attacks through measures like clearing checkpoints and ignoring identification.[710] And third was the state's tolerance of the Taliban's recruitment of foreign fighters, usually Pakistanis, who added punch to their cause.

Recruitment was an area where Pakistan's passive support was critical to the Taliban, particularly in the early days after the American invasion. Though the Quetta Shura would rely heavily on local recruitment in Afghanistan, far more than the Haqqani network, in the early days Pakistani recruits were critical to reconstituting both groups. After the former regime's leadership settled in Quetta, the proto-insurgency was in disarray. After taking stock of its remaining fighters, the Quetta Shura began a recruitment drive among madrassah students in Karachi and Balochistan. This effort had limited success at first, but was then expanded to the mosques, refugee camps, and Pakistani Pashtun villages of Quetta and perhaps KPK. Between 2004 and 2006 Pakistani madrassahs began to send an army of new recruits.[711] Foreigners were also recruited this way, mostly Pakistanis with a smattering of extraterritorial jihadists who

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[708] Seth Jones, "Pakistan's Dangerous Game," *Survival*, Vol. 49, 1 (2007): 18-19.
[709] The White House, "President Bush Welcomes President Musharraf to Camp David" (June 24, 2003), https://georgewbush-whitehouse.archives.gov/news/releases/2003/06/20030624-3.html (accessed December 2, 2018).
[710] Gretchen Peters, "Haqqani Network Financing: The Evolution of an Industry," *The Combating Terrorism Center at West Point* (July 2012), 36.
[711] Giustazzi (2007), 38, 43.

were usually better-trained and more able to conduct operations like suicide attacks.[712] These recruits were critical in sustaining the insurgency through its lean years. Those numbers began to fall in 2006, when the fighting strength of the Taliban rose back up to as much as 75 percent locally-based fighters.[713]

These recruits were particularly critical for the Quetta Shura Taliban because it fought and fundraised in different and more manpower-intensive ways than the Haqqani network. It needed people for both. The Haqqanis would become known for their facilitation networks and high-profile attacks, and were already conducting effective guerilla warfare, but with exception of some remote areas in Loya Paktia they were not landowners. They did not provide shadow governors for their provinces, only military commanders.[714] The Haqqanis formed an operational relationship with the budding Taliban insurgency early on, though their political relationship (as indeed it had been during the emirate) was nebulous and sometimes tense.[715] For one thing, they had only a minor representation on the insurgency's leadership committee, which was dominated by the Quetta Shura. But perhaps this was inevitable. They were not really offering an alternate national government to the one in Kabul, and the Quetta Shura certainly was. The Taliban worked to seize territory and villages throughout the country, excepting most of Loya Paktiya and the eastern highlands, and even committed to standoff fights with international forces.[716] The Taliban's primary operational focus remained in the south, however, in Helmand and Kandahar, where its movement was rooted and which supplied

[712] Jeffrey Dressler and Carl Forsberg, "The Quetta Shura Taliban in Southern Afghanistan: Organization, Operations, and Shadow Governance," *Institute for the Study of War,* Backgrounder (December 21, 2009): 3-4.
[713] Giustazzi (2007), 43.
[714] Giustazzi (2019), 80.
[715] Ruttig, 65-68.
[716] Giustazzi (2019), 133-135.

much of its cash flow from narcotics. Their formations were often larger than the Haqqani network, from five to thirty people or more. Though they received strategic guidance from their leadership in Pakistan, they also enjoyed significant autonomy at the district level.[717] These larger groups of fighters helped with financing as well. The Haqqani network received a significant portion of its funding from Persian Gulf donors and from Pakistan. The Quetta Shura Taliban by comparison relied on narcotics trafficking and other insurgent staples like taxing the local populace.[718] Both of these were manpower-intensive and required relatively more troops.

The two-pronged nature of Pakistan's proxy strategy meant that Pakistan could project power and keep military pressure on the Afghan government while delaying direct consequences from the United States, its major competitor. The insurgency grew slowly. Jalaluddin Haqqani, the senior leader most familiar with insurgent tactics, began operations from 2002-2003 with the help of the Pakistani government. The network relied on Haqqani's madrassah system and influence with Zadran tribal elders to build its influence.[719] It took the Quetta Shura Taliban until the next year to begin operations in any strength.[720] Other groups, such as Hekmatyar's Hezb-e Islami and al-Qaeda in the north and Mullah Nazir and Gul Bahadar in the south, also established facilities in Pakistan in places like South Waziristan.[721] American forces were certainly aware of the insurgent bases in Pakistan, and in January 2003 a spokesman for US forces frankly acknowledged their troops need to pursue militants across the border.[722] US Ambassador

[717] Dressler, (2009), 3-4.
[718] Dressler (2009), 8-9.
[719] Giustazzi (2007), 53.
[720] Giustazzi (2019), 31-32.
[721] Jones, 102.
[722] Chris Kraul, "American Forces Claim Right to Enter Pakistan," *Los Angeles Times* (January 4, 2003), http://articles.latimes.com/2003/jan/04/world/fg-pursuit4 (accessed July 1, 2016).

to Afghanistan Zalmay Khalilizad raised this issue repeatedly throughout his tenure from 2003 to 2005, including and especially the need to capture the Afghan Taliban living in Quetta.[723] However, Pakistan was treated gently. President Bush had built a good relationship with Pervez Musharraf who had cooperated with both the invasion of Afghanistan and the campaign against Al-Qaeda in the FATA.[724] The White House called him a "stalwart ally" in the War on Terror in June 2003, as well as a "courageous leader" and "friend of the United States."[725]

The growing base of militancy along Pakistan's border comprised a potent tool for projecting power into Afghanistan if the militants' interests aligned with Islamabad's. However, since most of them had few ties to the state, they also had more agency. Left to their own devices, the militants would strike Pakistani targets if the government encroached on their territory, assisted in counterterrorism strikes, and cracked down domestically on jihadist networks. At the very least, they could contribute to the lawlessness of the border areas that would allow more hostile militants to fester. This security challenge was exacerbated by the rise in Islamic extremism in Pakistan more broadly. By the time of the US invasion of Afghanistan, ten to fifteen percent of Pakistan's mosques were estimated to be affiliated with extremist groups.[726] According to police reports in one province, for example, 2,100 of Sindh's 12,500 madrassas were classified as dangerous. An estimated 800 madrassas in Karachi were linked to jihadists,

[723] Markey, 127.
[724] Barnett Rubin, Afghanistan from the Cold War through the War on Terror (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2013), 233.
[725] The White House, "President Bush Welcomes President Musharraf to Camp David" (June 24, 2003), https://georgewbush-whitehouse.archives.gov/news/releases/2003/06/20030624-3.html (accessed April 20, 2020).
[726] Singer, 3.

and 20 around Islamabad – the capital – were linked to domestic Taliban militant groups.[727]

This latent threat became more critical as Musharraf began to drift towards reconciliation with India and his goals began to deviate from the various goals of the militants. In addition to enabling American strikes on al-Qaeda, he pursued a conciliatory policy towards New Delhi after largely bearing responsibility for a series of confrontations – including a nuclear standoff – earlier in his tenure. Musharraf established a ceasefire with India in 2003 and explicitly put the issue of Kashmir on the back burner.[728] He would subsequently begin describing the peace process as "irreversible."[729] Blowback came soon. Two plots against Musharraf's life in 2003 spurred the government to try and increase its control over the FATA. Both plots were linked to militants in South Waziristan agency and were followed by senior al-Qaeda leader Ayman al-Zawahiri's call for Musharraf's death in December. A second crisis came on March 16, 2004, when members of Pakistan's paramilitary Frontier Corps (FC) attempted to seize a compound west of Wana, the agency's major town. Instead, they were ambushed by around 500 al-Qaeda and Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan (IMU) fighters and lost dozens of troops in a weeklong siege.[730] The failure of the operation was partially due to the ISI allegedly withholding information about the militants from other security forces.[731]

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[727] International Crisis Group (2015): 12.
[728] Stephen Cohen, *Shooting for a Century: The India-Pakistan Conundrum* (Washington, DC: Brookings Institution Press, 2013), 107.
[729] "India and Pakistan say peace 'irreversible,'" *The Guardian* (April 18, 2005), https://www.theguardian.-com/world/2005/apr/18/kashmir.india (accessed October 10, 2017).
[730] Pervez Musharraf, *In the Line of Fire: A Memoir* (New York: Free Press, 2006), 267-268.
[731] Rashid (2008), 271.

Here, the passive support Pakistan offered militants in the FATA increased Pakistan's deniability with the insurgency in Afghanistan but contributed to a functional capability gap domestically that was dangerous. The extent of militancy and the considerable arsenals that were hidden in many madrassahs (particularly in the FATA) meant police were often outgunned and orders became requests, contingent on the goodwill of clerics.[732] Even if a majority of voters wanted the authorities to crack down on militants, they were sufficiently strong that enforcement required more political and military effort than basic law enforcement could provide. Under the FATA's colonial-era arrangement, the tribes were largely left to govern themselves, with order maintained loosely by governmental Political Officers who negotiated disputes and settlements with the tribes. There was also the Frontier Corps, a body which was deputized to keep order in the FATA but which in reality like the police was often outgunned.[733] That meant relying on military operations, which again faced inertia, partially because the army was deeply affected by Zia's Islamicization. Pakistan's military and intelligence officers were undoubtedly more conservative than the preceding generation, including at the senior level, partially a result of Zia's policies and their support to the mujahedin in Afghanistan.[734] American academic Vali Nasr, testifying before the Senate Foreign Relations Committee on July 14, 2004, noted that extremism was on the rise and there

[732] International Crisis Group (2015): 13.
[733] Hassan Abbas, Police & Law Enforcement Reform in Pakistan: Crucial for Counterinsurgency and Counterterrorism Success, *Institute for Social Policy and Understanding* (April 2009), http://www.ispu.org/pdfs/ISPU%20-%20Police%20Reforms%20in%20Pakistan%20Report.pdf (accessed June 19, 2016).
[734] Cohen, 116; Giustazzi (2007), 25.

was corresponding sympathy in the Pakistani military for jihadist views, which affected the counterterrorism fight.[735]

Nor did Pakistan necessarily have the capability to cut off funding for the militant institutions, since they had developed independent financial links abroad. In congressional testimony, police leaders estimated that 950 schools in just one province alone – Punjab – received funds from countries like Qatar, Saudi Arabia, and Kuwait.[736] The Haqqani network also developed these sources, building offices in the Middle East and reducing its dependence on Pakistan and increasing state deniability. The US Treasury Department would eventually designate several Haqqani logisticians as terrorists for their work in raising money from places like the United Arab Emirates.[737] The Haqqanis also had a vast array of smuggling and other businesses that relied on shipping items like precious stones, lumber, and chromite from the Loya Paktia region to Pakistan. Some of these were legitimate businesses in Pakistan proper, such as real estate and car dealerships, and others were not.[738] In North Waziristan, they collected taxes and fees in much the same way as a regular government. They were also active in the media market, selling subscriptions to a monthly magazine, *Manba al-Jihad*. But their

[735] Senate Committee on Foreign Relations, "Pakistan: Balancing Reform and Counterterrorism," (July 14, 2004).
[736] International Crisis Group (2015): 16-17.
[737] For example, United States Department of the Treasury, "Press Release" (June 21, 2010), https://www.treasury.gov/-resource-center/sanctions/OFAC-Enforcement/Documents/taliban_notice_06212011.pdf (accessed May 16, 2016).
[738] Mark Mazzetti, Scott Shane, and Alissa Rubin, "Brutal Haqqani Crime Clan Bedevils U.S. in Afghanistan," *The New York Times*, September 24, 2011, http://www.nytimes.com/2011/09/25-/world/asia/brutal-haqqani-clan-bedevils-united-states-in-afghanistan.html (accessed May 16, 2016).

fundraising also included more criminal activities, like kidnapping and protection rackets for American and Afghan reconstruction projects in Khost.[739]

All of these elements of Pakistan's lack of control over its local Islamist militants and the militants' corresponding independence made the Haqqanis' relatively close connection to the state vital. As both the Afghan insurgency and domestic militancy increased, Pakistan relied on the Haqqani network to mitigate the cost of its passive support. Due in part to its operational weakness, the Pakistani government tried to negotiate three separate peace agreements with the FATA militants from 2004 to 2006. Two of these were short-lived and poorly received among Pakistan's Western allies. The first was broken in 2004, after attacks against a Frontier Corps fort and an army school in Tiarzeh. In September, the Pakistani army launched a large-scale operation involving 10,000 troops against militants under Baitullah Mehsud and foreign fighters in South Waziristan. It was largely ineffective, and many of the militants fled into North Waziristan.[740] After the fall operation, Islamabad attempted to end the fighting with a second South Waziristan peace deal in uary with Mehsud. The state agreed that he would be able to impose elements of sharia law under his territory, while Mehsud agreed not to allow militants into Afghanistan and cut off ties with the Taliban. Again the agreement failed.[741]

In North Waziristan, after a period of militant attacks against its facilities, the Pakistani government attempted to negotiate a third agreement in September 2006.

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[739] Senate Committee on Foreign Affairs, *Combating the Haqqani Terrorist Network*, 112th Cong., 2d sess., 2012, S. Hrg. 177, 2, https://www-gpo-gov.proxy1.library.jhu.edu/fdsys/pkg/CHRG-112hhrg-7586-0/pdf/CHRG-112hhrg75860.pdf (accessed May 14, 2016).
[740] Musharraf, 270-271.
[741] Rana, 12-13.

However, this one was mediated by Jalaluddin Haqqani. The Pakistani army agreed to remove its checkpoints and roadblocks in North Waziristan, return captured equipment, and release the militants it had captured.[742] In exchange, Gul Bahadar and other militants agreed to forego Pakistani army targets in Pakistan and focus on Afghanistan.[743] In another example, when militants captured Pakistan's ambassador to Afghanistan Tariq Azizuddin, Haqqani reportedly interceded with the Pakistani Taliban and secured Azizuddin's release.[744] Pakistan paid heavily for the exchange, handing over a reported $2.5 million, numerous Pakistani Taliban prisoners, and two high-ranking members of the Afghan Taliban. Thus, the state ceded even more agency to its proxies by reducing its local control, but it did manage to secure a respite that its military capabilities alone were unable to achieve.

As unhelpful militancy against the Pakistani state increased in the FATA, so too did helpful militancy increase against Afghanistan. By 2006, insurgent attacks had risen to the point where they were beginning to threaten the viability of the Afghan government. Direct attacks from insurgents using small arms or rocket-propelled grenades grew from 1,558 in 2005 to 4,542 in 2006. Suicide bombings rose from 27 to 139 and IED attacks had increased from 783 to 1,677.[745] Assassinations were up, as insurgents targeted government officials and security personnel, and chipped away at Kabul's ability to keep order.[746] The Quetta Shura Taliban was beginning to hold land, establishing control over villages and districts in Kandahar and Helmand.[747] Afghan

[742] Rashid (2008), 277.
[743] Gul, 64; Brown and Rassler, 159.
[744] Brown and Rassler, 159.
[745] David Cloud, "U.S. Says Attacks Are Surging in Afghanistan," *The New York Times* (January 16, 2007), http://www.nytimes.com/2007/01/16/world/asia/16cnd-gates.html?_r=0 (accessed June 23, 2016).
[746] Jones, 207.
[747] Giustazzi (2007), 5-6.

officials had no doubt about where the violence was coming from. In a 2006 interview with PBS, Afghan intelligence chief Amrullah Saleh said the Afghan government was "fighting proxy forces created by Pakistan." Its neighbor was a "breeding ground for insurgents," at several different levels. "If you look at the pattern of propaganda in the Pakistani media against Afghanistan – and some of the papers are state-sponsored papers – they clearly try to undermine the Afghan government." Funding was coming from "undercover charities," so as to "conceal the official hand." And the 80,000 Pakistani troops stationed in the borderlands were allegedly giving free reign to Afghan Taliban leaders.[748]

However, the American response to this offensive was overall relatively restrained. The two-pronged nature of Pakistan's proxy strategy meant that Pakistan could project power while delaying direct consequences from the United States, its major balancing power in Afghanistan. American forces were certainly aware of the insurgent bases in  stan: they had pushed on this subject as early as January 2003, when spokesmen for US troops were assuring reporters that they reserved the right to pursue militants across the border.[749] But President Bush enjoyed good relations with Pervez Musharraf, who had made concessions both to the American war in Afghanistan and against terrorism more broadly.[750] Bush recognized Musharraf had put himself at risk by his support of American counterterrorism operations against al-Qaeda in the FATA.[751]

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[748] *Frontline* interview with Amrullah Saleh, Public Broadcasting Service (October 3, 2006), http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/pages/frontline/taliban/interviews/saleh.html (accessed May 22, 2016).
[749] Chris Kraul, "American Forces Claim Right to Enter Pakistan," *Los Angeles Times* (January 4, 2003), http://articles.latimes.com/2003/jan/04/world/fg-pursuit4 (accessed July 1, 2016).
[750] Barnett Rubin, *Afghanistan from the Cold War through the War on Terror* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2013), 233.
[751] Bob Woodward, *Bush at War* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2002), 289; Sheryl Stolberg, "Bush failed to see Musharraf's Faults, Critics Contend," *The New York Times* (November 18, 2007), https://www.nytimes.com/2007/11/18washington/18prexy.html (accessed October 1, 2017).

Musharraf had also pursued a restrained foreign policy elsewhere, such as prioritizing engagement with India, and had paid for it, with increasing domestic dissatisfaction and three assassination attempts since 2003. As late as 2007, Bush was calling Musharraf a "loyal ally" in fighting terrorism, and saying he was a "man of his word."[752]

Intensification, 2007-2013

As violence in Afghanistan increased, Pakistani foreign policy began to shift in 2007. Musharraf's political capital at home was badly weakened by two events. First, the firing of the head of Pakistan's judiciary resulted in months-long protests by the so-called Lawyers' Movement and sporadic violence. Second, Musharraf faced a confrontation over Islamabad's Red Mosque, which contained thousands of students and was a recognized transit place for jihadists heading to Afghanistan.[753] Religious zealots began enforcing elements of Sharia law in the surrounding blocks, harassing women and banning shopkeepers from selling Western products like movies. Eventually, the regime had enough. In early July, Pakistan's army seized the mosque after ten days of fighting and more than a hundred casualties.[754] The confrontation provoked another spike of violence internally, this time beyond the FATA. Bombings and terror attacks rocked the North-West Frontier Province, and fighters gathered in its Swat Valley as a show of defiance to the Pakistani state.

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[752] "Charles Gibson Interviews President George W. Bush and First Lady Laura Bush," *ABC News* (November 20, 2007), http://mads.boitano.net/news/politics/national/ABC%20News%20TRANSCRIPT-%20Gibson%20Interviews%20Bush.htm (accessed October 24, 2017).
[753] Rashid (2008), 382.
[754] Matthew Pennington, "Red Mosque Complex Battered After Battle," *The Washington Post* (July 12, 2007), http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2007/07/12/AR20070712011-51_pf.html (accessed July 15, 2016).

These domestic tensions coincided with an intensification of long-running international objections to Musharraf's rule, and in particular his continuation as both head of the military and head of state. Democratization and a focus on the 2007 elections became an increasing theme of US public statements about the war.[755] The Commonwealth of former British colonies warned Musharraf in early 2007 he must choose a military or civilian role by the time of the election, and suspended him when he did not.[756] Under significant domestic and foreign pressure, he finally stepped down as army chief in November 2007 and was replaced by General Ashfaq Kayani. Shorn of his military base, Musharraf would lose elections the next year and be forced to leave the country. Pakistan's new President Asif Ali Zardari tried to continue Musharraf's foreign policy alignment with the West but as a civilian had far less control of Pakistan's military apparatus, including its ties with proxy forces. General Kayani did have control of them, however. Kayani rejected Musharraf's détente with India and sought to re-prioritize the fight for Kashmir. He believed that Pakistani military doctrine remained centered around the threat from India and that the concept of strategic depth was still critical.[757] After a massive attack by Pakistani militants in Mumbai in February 2008, India suspended the former president's signature dialogue.

In Afghanistan, contacts between Pakistani security officials and the Taliban also increased as insurgent attacks ticked upwards.[758] Security incidents in the spring and

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[755] See, for example, The White House, "President Addresses Asia Society, Discusses India and Pakistan" (February 22, 2006, https://georgewbush-whitehouse.archives.gov/news/releases/2006/02/20060222-2.html (accessed December 28, 2018).
[756] "Pakistan Suspended from Commonwealth," *CBC* News (November 22, 2007), https://www.cbc.ca/-news/world/pakistan-suspended-from-commonwealth-1.641388 (accessed December 22, 2018).
[757] Christian Wagner, "Pakistan's Foreign Policy between India and Afghanistan," *Sicherheit und Freiden* 28, no. 4 (2010): 250.
[758] Seth Jones and Christine Fair, *Counterinsurgency in Pakistan* (Santa Monica: Rand, 2010), 17.

summer of 2008 reached their highest peak since the invasion, up 40 percent from the year before.[759] In 2008, one hundred and fifty-five US servicemen died in Afghanistan, up from a hundred and seventeen the year before and ninety-eight in 2006.[760] After its initial reconstitution, the Quetta Shura Taliban had stepped up operations dramatically in the south since 2004 and spread its military influence out to Herat and the key adjoining Kabul provinces, primarily Logar and Wardak. This allowed it to threaten supply convoys going to ISAF forces in the capital.[761] By the end of 2007, the Taliban had advanced operations sufficiently to start pressuring the main highway linking Kandahar and Herat to Kabul, threatening to choke off the key arteries of the nation.[762] Where it had presence, and where it could, the Taliban occupied villages and created parallel government structures to establish control over the population.[763] On February 5, 2008, Director of National Intelligence Admiral Michael McConnell acknowledged to the Senate Armed Services Committee that "[t]he security situation has deteriorated in the south and Taliban forces have expanded operation into previously peaceful areas of the west and around Kabul."[764]

Operations in Kabul proper were something different, however. There was some violence but the Haqqani network had not yet begun conducting the spectacular attacks

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[759] U.S. Department of Defense, *Report on Progress Toward Security and Stability in Afghanistan*, (November 2008), 7, http://www.defense.gov/Portals/1/Documents-/pubs/OCTOBER_1230_FINAL.-pdf (accessed May 15, 2016).
[760] iCasualties.org, "Operation Enduring Freedom," http://icasualties.org/OEF/ByYe-ar.aspx (accessed May 27, 2016).
[761] Mohammed Osman Tarik Elias, "The Resurgence of the Taliban in Kabul: Logar and Wardak," in *Decoding the New Taliban: Insights from the Afghan Field*, ed. Antonio Giustazzi (New York: Columbia University Press, 2009), 45-48.
[762] Elias, 46.
[763] Giustazzi (2019), 297.
[764] U.S. Congress. Senate. Committee on Armed Services. *The Strategy in Afghanistan and Recent Reports By The Afghanistan Study Group And The Atlantic Council Of The United States.* 110th Cong., 2d sess., February 14, 2008, S. Hrg. 612, 25, https://www.gpo.gov/fdsys/pkg/CHRG-110shrg45501/html/CHRG-110shrg45501.htm (accessed May 10, 2016).

for which it would later become infamous, and which would bring American attention to their sponsor. In the east, the Haqqanis had sustained a continually high level of guerilla warfare since 2003. In his home territories of Khost, Paktika, and Paktiya, Haqqani remained focused on guerilla warfare, mostly hit and run attacks. By the start of 2007, Haqqani was able to threaten the Khost-Gardez pass, a key road that was cut off throughout the Soviet war yet still remained open during the American one. With less presence on the ground than the Taliban, and with lighter manpower needs, Haqqani could rely on the support of his madrassah network and his influence with tribal leaders in Loya Paktia to field an effective fighting force.[765] Haqqani recruited correspondingly fewer local Afghans than the Quetta Shura, and instead focused on developing hardened cadres from his schools.[766] Haqqani's ISI contacts were also instrumental in helping him solidify his local support, allowing him to bribe tribal elders with Pakistani passports, houses across the border, and trips to the Persian Gulf.[767]

The worsening security situation did incite a strategic reaction by the United States, though not yet with corresponding consequences or public blame for Pakistan. Washington began to increase force levels rapidly. In 2007 the United States had had 13,000 troops in Afghanistan under ISAF command, part of a larger 50,000 troop international contingent. After repeated plus-ups during Bush's last two years, that number rose to 32,000 by the end of 2008.[768] The increasing violence provoked an even steeper increase by the new US President Barack Obama, who had been fiercely critical of the Bush Administration's alleged inattention to Afghanistan during his campaign.

[765] Giustazzi (2007), 53.
[766] Giustazzi (2019), 246, 248.
[767] Ruttig, 75.
[768] U.S. Department of Defense, *Report on Progress* (2008), 8.

Obama and his surrogates repeatedly promised to shift focus from what they described as a distracting war of choice in Iraq and concentrate on "the good war," America's original mission in the mountains.[769] This began with a leadership change. In June, Obama replaced the US commander General David McKiernan with General Stanley McChrystal, who as commander of Joint Special Operations Command had revolutionized American counterterrorism.

McChrystal's view of the situation was dire. Like the year prior, 2009 would be the most violent year on record, with 317 US troops killed. That number would rise by almost 60 percent again in 2010.[770] In his initial assessment in August, McChrystal warned, "Although considerable effort and sacrifice have resulted in some progress, many indicators suggest the overall situation is deteriorating. We face not only a resilient and growing insurgency; there is also a crisis of confidence among Afghans…that undermines our credibility and emboldens the insurgents."[771] He also called for increasing America's military commitment. McChrystal recommended adding 40,000 additional US troops to the effort, as well as more international forces, on top of the roughly 30,000 that had already been sent to the country under the new president. Obama eventually sent his general another 30,000 troops.[772]

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[769] Peter Spiegel, Jonathan Weisman, Yochi Dreazen, "Obama Bets Big on Troop Surge," *The Wall Street Journal* (December 2, 2009), http://www.wsj.com/article-s/SB125967363641871171 (accessed May 29, 2016).
[770] iCasualties.org, "Operation Enduring Freedom," http://icasualties.org/OEF/ByYe-ar.aspx (accessed May 27, 2016).
[771] Stanley McChrystal, "Comisaf's Initial Assessment" (August 30, 2009), 1-1, http://media.washi-ngtonpost.com/wp-srv/politics/documents/Assessment_Reda-cted_092109.pdf?sid=ST2009092003140 (accessed May 10, 2016).
[772] The White House, "Remarks by the President in Address to the Nation on the Way Forward in Afghanistan and Pakistan" (December 1, 2009), https://www.whitehouse.gov/the-press-office/re-marks-president-address-nation-way-forward-afghanis-tan-and-pakistan (accessed June 1, 2016).

The Obama Administration was taking this seriously – it could hardly do less, after the president's laceration of the Bush Administration's policy during the campaign. However, the White House initially sounded relatively sanguine about Pakistan's role in the violence. During Obama's March 2009 rollout of his new Afghan strategy, he urged a supportive relationship, saying "Pakistan needs our help in going after al-Qaeda." His language was in certain ways stronger than Bush's, promising that Islamabad would not be offered a "blank check", but remained in the vein of Pakistan as victim, not as perpetrator. He also announced the launching of a trilateral mechanism to improve cooperation among the US, Pakistan, and Afghanistan, and called for more military cooperation along the border.[773] In May, during a summit with both the Afghan and Pakistani presidents, Obama again made careful note of the ambiguity of the border, and here there was a less recriminatory tone. The US would "work together with a renewed sense of partnership" to fight "our common enemies."[774] US Secretary of State Hillary Clinton called the meeting a "breakthrough," and also announced a new major trade arrangement with the Pakistanis to help foster "common cause for common objective.[775]

In truth, Pakistan and the US did partially share an interest in confronting militant violence spreading from the FATA. And there had been a correlation between the increase of violence in Afghanistan, attributable to the Afghan Taliban groups, and that

[773] The White House, "Remarks by the President on a New Strategy for Afghanistan and Pakistan" (March 27, 2009), https://obamawhitehouse.archives.gov/the-press-office/remarks-president-a-new-strategy-afghanistan-and-pakistan (accessed January 3, 2019).
[774] The White House, "Remarks by the President after trilateral meeting with President Karzai of Afghanistan and President Zardari of Pakistan" (May 6, 2009), https://obamawhitehouse.archives.gov/the-press-office/remarks-president-after-trilateral-meeting-with-president-karzai-afghanistan-and-pr (accessed January 5, 2019).
[775] The White House, "Press Briefing by Secretary of State Hillary Clinton and Press Secretary Robert Gibbs" (May 6, 2009), https://obamawhitehouse.archives.gov/the-press-office/briefing-secretary-state-hillary-clinton-and-press-secretary-robert-gibbs-5-6-09 (accessed January 6, 2019).

within Pakistan, attributable to the Pakistani Taliban or TTP. But it was a loose interest only, because the militants targeting Pakistan and those targeting Afghanistan were usually different: thus their utility for Pakistan was different, and the state's interest in confronting them was different. North and South Waziristan had been all but abandoned to both kinds of radicals after 2004, despite abortive attempts by the military to reclaim control in 2007 and 2008.[776] Militia leaders targeting both Afghanistan and Pakistan – Gul Bahadar, Mullah Nazir, and Baitullah Mehsud – proceeded to form the Council of United Mujahideen in February 2009.[777] After blockading South Waziristan for three months, and after Baitullah himself was killed by a drone strike on August 5, 2009, the military launched its operation into Mehsud tribal territory in October with between 30,000 and 60,000 troops. Pakistan claimed that nearly 600 of the dead were militants and declared victory in December. However, many TTP members including Baitullah Mehsud's successor Hakiemullah Mehsud appeared to have fled to North Waziristan.[778] Pakistan subsequently used the Haqqani network to mitigate the lawlessness of the militants by establishing tribal councils of leaders to institutionalize mediation of disputes.[779] This lent the Haqqanis an additional utility, and additionally decreased Pakistani incentive in confronting them.

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[776] Bill Roggio, "South Waziristan offensive 'punitive,' not counterinsurgency," *The Long War Journal* (July 15, 2009), http://www.longwarjournal.org/archives/2009/07/south_waziristan_off.php (accessed May 28, 2016).
[777] Bill Roggio, "Waziristan Taliban alliance declares support for Osama bin Laden and Mullah Omar," *The Long War Journal* (February 23, 2009), http://www.longwarjournal.org/archives/2009/02/w-aziristan_taliban_a.php (accessed May 28, 2016).
[778] Rahimullah Yusufzai, "Assessing the progress of Pakistan's south Waziristan offensive," *Counter-Terrorism Center at West Point* (December 3, 2009), https://www.ctc.usma.edu/posts/assessing-the-progress-of-pakistan's-south-waziristan-offensive (accessed May 29, 2016).
[779] Brown and Rassler, 143.

And yet the primary purpose of the Haqqani network was warfare in Afghanistan, and particularly high-visibility attacks against Western and Indian targets within Kabul. Though violence had been steadily increasing in Afghanistan, high-profile operations by the Haqqani network began to appear with more regularity only in 2008. These often involved complex plans involving several attackers, suicide bombings, and direct fire. On July 7, a suicide bomber in Kabul killed 58 people in an attack targeting the Indian defense attaché, who died in the blast. US intelligence officials placed the blame on Lashkar-e Taiba and the Haqqanis, and claimed to have intercepted operational communications between the ISI and the Haqqani network planning the attack.[780] Three other major vehicle-borne explosive attacks that year were also attributed to the Haqqanis, including a complex attack against a foreign delegation at the Serena Hotel in Kabul and an assassination attempt against Afghan President Hamid Karzai.[781] A second bombing against the Indian Embassy in Kabul a year later was similarly attributed to the Haqqani network and Pakistan.[782] Al-Qaeda claimed responsibility for a sophisticated bombing at Forward Operating Base Chapman in 2009 that killed seven CIA officers, but US intelligence indicated that the ISI had paid the Haqqanis $200,000 to assist with the attack.[783] A reported seventy percent of insurgent violence in Kabul was carried out by the Haqqani network, and virtually all of the spectacular attacks.[784] The Haqqani network was also effective in other forms of advanced operations. It achieved a major

[780] "Mapping Militant Organizations: Haqqani Network," *Stanford University* (Last modified July 2018), https://cisac.fsi.stanford.edu/mappingmilitants/profiles/haqqani-network (accessed June 10, 2020); Brown and Rassler, 157.
[781] Gul, 64.
[782] Brown and Rassler, 157.
[783] "Pakistan dismisses claims of ties to 2009 suicide bombers targeting CIA officers," *Guardian*, April 15, 2016, http://www.theguardian.com/world/2016/apr/15/afghanistan-chapman-bombing-pakis-tani-ties-cia-us-claims (accessed May 28, 2016).
[784] Giustazzi (2019), 87.

coup in the capture of US Sergeant Bowe Bergdahl in 2009. Bergdahl was held in Haqqani territory in North Waziristan, in the Shawal Valley and Miram Shah, under the care of Mullah Sangeen Zadran, a top Haqqani network leader.[785] All of these operations necessarily required a high degree of training and organization, which would have been more challenging for the Quetta Shura Taliban with its more rudimentary operational capabilities and looser command and control.

However, many of these operations were tactically successful but strategically foolhardy. They represented Pakistan's primary strategic liability in Afghanistan and the flashpoint that eventually incited balancing. These attacks, not the overall deteriorating security picture, brought increased American recriminations against Pakistan and did little to advance Pakistan's goals more than the Taliban's more "conventional" operations. During the fall of the Obama Administration's first year, American language describing Pakistan's role in the insurgency took a sharply more negative tone. Gone were the public declarations of trust and friendship. During an October 2009 trip to Pakistan, US Secretary of State Hillary Clinton caused a stir when she bluntly said that al-Qaeda had been in Pakistan for nearly a decade and she found it very hard to believe that the Pakistani government did not know where they were. She referred to a trust deficit between the two countries and said the Pakistanis were simply not doing enough to pressure the Afghan Taliban.[786] President Obama followed that up two months later

[785] David Zucchino, David Cloud, and Shashank Bengali "Bowe Bergdahl's captors: Who, where, why?" *LA Times* (June 14, 2014) http://www.latimes.com/world/afg-hanistan-pakistan/la-fg-bergdahl-captivity-20140615-story.html (accessed June 1, 2016).
[786] U.S. Department of State, "Interview With Wyatt Andrews of CBS" (October 30, 2009), https://2009-2017.state.gov/secretary/20092013clinton/rm/2009a/10/131136.htm (accessed January 10, 2019).

by stating that the United States could not tolerate safe havens on the border, more stark language about Pakistan than Bush had ever used.

By the winter, however, with no further major complex attacks by the Haqqani network, the pressure had eased off. A massive new assistance package for Islamabad was released, sending Pakistan $7.5 billion over five years. This was followed by the US and Pakistan restarting an upgraded Strategic Dialogue at the ministerial level in March 2010, devoted to "strengthening the bilateral relationship and building an even broader partnership based on mutual respect and mutual trust." US rhetoric also warmed towards Pakistan, tacking back towards the Bush framework of a partnership. Clinton eased off her earlier statements and recast Pakistan again in the mold of victim, praising the government for courage" and promising America's "full support."[787]

By the summer of 2010, the bilateral relationship had only become warmer. Clinton said she felt "strongly that the Pakistani Government has become very serious about fighting terrorism within their own borders and working with Afghanistan and the United States to try to stabilize the region. When I became Secretary of State, that wasn't happening; there was not the extraordinary commitment of military assets against different terrorist groups that we now see." In a different interview, she said the US had "certainly seen a change in attitude on the part of the Pakistani Government." This was a line that held even in the face of a massive document dump by the press freedom organization Wikileaks in July 2010, which described closer than publicly known Pakistani security cooperation with the Afghan insurgents. From the White House,

[787] U.S. Department of State, "Opening Session of the U.S.-Pakistan Strategic Dialogue" (March 24, 2010), https://2009-2017.state.gov/secretary/20092013clinton/rm/2010/03/138984.htm (accessed January 10, 2019).

Robert Gibbs echoed Clinton's more positive sentiments: "I will tell you that we have made progress in moving this relationship forward; in having the Pakistanis, as I said earlier, address the issue of safe havens, the issue of extremists operating in the country."[788] By December 2010, President Obama was also heralding the Pakistani government's new approach, saying "Increasingly, the Pakistani government recognizes that terrorist networks in its border regions are a threat to all our countries, especially Pakistan."[789] In a press briefing the same month, Clinton was celebrating "an entirely different approach" by the Pakistanis against their homegrown militants: "That was not something that was predicted two years ago that they would do. They've done it."[790]

This was a remarkable statement in the context of a full-blown US effort against an insurgent enemy backed by Pakistani institutions. The Quetta Shura Taliban proved to be a formidable and resilient force themselves, despite the comparative lack of direct support from Pakistan. There was perhaps no better example of the differing utility of Pakistani proxies than the first head-to-head collision of Obama's new strategy with the insurgency at a town called Marjah in central Helmand Province, where a combined operation by 15,000 ISAF troops sought to cut off part of the Quetta Shura Taliban's drug transshipment lines and reimpose governmental authority. It was more than drugs: Marjah was emblematic of a growing Taliban control of south and central Helmand

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[788] The White House, "Press Briefing by Press Secretary Robert Gibbs" (July 26, 2010), https://obamawhitehouse.archives.gov/the-press-office/press-briefing-press-secretary-robert-gibbs-7262010 (accessed January 11, 2019).
[789] The White House, "Statement by the President on the Afghanistan-Pakistan Annual Review" (December 16, 2010), https://obamawhitehouse.archives.gov/the-press-office/2010/12/16/statement-president-afghanistan-pakistan-annual-review (accessed January 13, 2019).
[790] The White House, "Press Briefing with Press Secretary Robert Gibbs, Secretary of State Clinton, Secretary of Defense Gates, and General Cartwright" (December 16, 2010), https://obamawhitehouse.-archives.gov/the-press-office/2010/12/16/press-briefing-press-secretary-robert-gibbs-secretary-state-clinton-secr (accessed January 14, 2019).

which allowed the group to dominate the north and help project power into Kandahar and the ring road. US control of Marjah and central Helmand would interdict supply networks of people and materiel back and forth to Balochistan, isolate the north, and bring the province back under control. In theory. In fact Marjah became emblematic not of the new counterinsurgency strategy but of classic insurgent – and proxy – success. Though the named Operation Moshtarek was ultimately successful, fighting lasted far longer than the US expected. The 'clear' phase of counterinsurgency was quick, but 'hold' was elusive. McChrystal and his command suggested thirty days would be necessary to clear the area. In fact, the higher-end Taliban forces pulled out within days and the local enemy went to ground. Marines and their Afghan police partners quickly gained control of the town. Reports surfaced of the Taliban shadow governor entering the area in April, along with Taliban fighters returning for the poppy harvest. Insurgents placed IEDs and waged an effective campaign of assassination and intimidation. By late May, firefights in the area were on the rise. From mid-May to mid-June there were more casualties than in the first month of the operation.[791] By December 2010 Defense Secretary Robert Gates was acknowledging that the Marjah campaign had "taken longer and been more difficult than we anticipated," but speculated that in another six months the town would be in a "pretty good place" and congratulated the Pakistanis for increasing cooperation and effectiveness in securing the border.[792] It was never truly pacified. Sporadic violence in the town continued for years, and indeed lasted until

[791] Jeffrey Dressler, "Marjah's Lessons for Kandahar," *Institute for the Study of War*, Backgrounder (July 9, 2010), 4.
[792] The White House, "Press Briefing with Press Secretary Robert Gibbs, Secretary of State Clinton, Secretary of Defense Gates, and General Cartwright" (December 16, 2010), https://obamawhitehouse.archives.gov/the-press-office/2010/12/16/press-briefing-press-secretary-robert-gibbs-secretary-state-clinton-secr (accessed January 14, 2019).

international forces withdrew from most of the province four years later. The trouble McChrystal's campaign ran into in Marjah and northern Helmand was an indicator of how robust the Quetta Shura's insurgency could be generally even without the Haqqanis, and how little Pakistan would be threatened by the US directly.

When the US-Pakistan relationship finally faced significant and sustained tensions in 2011, it came with an uptick in Haqqani complex attacks as well as a brace of other crises. In January, a CIA contractor shot and killed two Pakistanis in disputed circumstances before being flown out of the country under a cover of diplomatic immunity in April. In May 2011, a US raid killed Osama bin Laden in a compound close to Pakistan's major military academy in Abbotabad, making the government's claim of ignorance almost fanciful. But despite these flashpoints, US statements remained relatively restrained. The President in May made special note that it was the cooperation with Pakistan that had led to bin Laden's capture. As late as June 2011, White House spokesman Jay Carney was describing the US relationship with Pakistan as complicated, but an "extremely important" one with an "important partner." He stressed the need to value the relationship and highlighted that it was "important to remember the successes we have had – successes that have come, in many cases, precisely because we have this [bilateral] cooperation."[793] And the President again on June 22, in a major speech on Afghanistan, was portraying Pakistan as the victim: no country, he said, "is more endangered by violent extremists."

[793] The White House, "Press Briefing by Press Secretary Jay Carney," (June 15, 2011), https://obamawhitehouse.archives.gov/the-press-office/2011/06/15/press-briefing-press-secretary-jay-carney-6152011 (accessed January 15, 2019).

That changed after a new spate of attacks from the Haqqani network. On June 28, 2011, several gunmen attacked a heavily guarded luxury hotel in Kabul, killing twelve people.[794] In September, a major truck bombing in Sayyedabad, south of Kabul, wounded 77 ISAF troops and killed five civilians. That attack came days before a major siege of the US Embassy and ISAF headquarters in Kabul, in which 16 Afghan police officers and civilians died.[795] An assassin killed the Afghan government's chief peacemaker Bernahuddin Rabbani on September 20, 2011, allegedly with the support of the Haqqani network. Rabbani's loss was a particular blow for reconciliation efforts: he had been a leading mujahedeen in the 1980's and President of Afghanistan after the Soviet withdrawal. It was a clear indication that Pakistan wanted to control the political agenda of how and when the war would end.[797] One month later, on October 29, 2011, the Haqqani network was also responsible for a truck bomb in Kabul that killed 13 American troops.[798]

Coupled with the increasing tempo of Haqqani operations against American targets, these high-profile attacks placed Pakistan's deniability in unprecedented jeopardy. After three months of them that summer, US policy statements hardened and focused on the links between the Pakistani government and the Haqqani network, which heretofore it had not. On September 22, 2011, the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff

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[794] Alissa Rubin, "Attack at Kabul Hotel Deflates Security Hopes in Afghanistan," *The New York Times* (June 29, 2011), http://www.nytimes.com/20-11/06/30/world/asia/30afghanistan.html (accessed May 22, 2016).
[795] Elizabeth Bumiller and Jane Perlez, "Pakistan's Spy Agency is Tied to Attack on U.S. Embassy," *The New York Times* (September 22, 2011), http://www.nytimes.com/2011/09/23/world/asia/mullen-asserts-pakistani-role-in-attack-on-us-embassy.html (accessed May 19, 2016).
[797] Christine Fair, "Pakistan in 2011: Ten Years of the "War on Terror," *Asian Survey* 52, no. 1 (January/February 2012), 105.
[798] Rob Nordland, "12 Americans Die as Blast Hits Bus in Afghanistan," *The New York Times* (October 29, 2011), http://www.nytimes.com/2011/10/30/world/asia/deadly-attack-strikes-nato-bus-in-kabul.html (accessed June 5, 2016).

Admiral Mike Mullen publicly blamed Pakistan's ISI for supporting the earlier attacks on the Intercontinental Hotel, the Sayyedabad troops, the embassy and military headquarters, and scores of lower-profile events. The Haqqani network, he said, "acts as a veritable arm of Pakistani intelligence." Until then, Mullen had been considered one of the more pro-Pakistan members of the Administration.[799] Though the administration tried to clean up his comments, six days later White House spokesman Jay Carney called the links between the Pakistani military and the Haqqani network "troubling," and said the US wanted action taken against them, the first time he had used that word.[800] Secretary Clinton added separately that the process of deciding whether to designate the Haqqani network as rorist organization was in its final formal review.[801] In response to the succession of attacks on the Embassy and other targets, US and Afghan forces launched a major assault on the Haqqanis' Loya Paktia facilitation networks on October 16, 2011, entitled Operation Knife Edge. During private meetings in late 2011 and early 2012 with the Pakistani military leadership, the new US commander General John Allen also demanded that Pakistani forces move against the qanis. At a public forum with Pakistan's prime minister in March 2012, Obama acknowledged "strains" in the US-Pakistani relationship.[802]

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[799] Bumiller and Perlez (2011).
[800] The White House, "Press Briefing by Press Secretary Jay Carney" (September 28, 2011), https://obamawhitehouse.archives.gov/the-press-office/2011/09/28/press-briefing-press-secretary-jay-carney (accessed January 16, 2019).
[801] "Clinton says U.S. close to decision on Haqqanis," *Reuters* (September 28, 2011), https://www.reuters.com/article/us-pakistan-usa-haqqani/clinton-says-u-s-close-to-decision-on-haqqanis-idUSTRE78R5F020110928 (accessed March 31, 2020).
[802] The White House, "Remarks by President Obama and Prime Minister Gilani of Pakistan before Bilateral Meeting" (March 27, 2012), https://obamawhitehouse.archives.gov/the-press-office/2012/03/27/remarks-president-obama-and-prime-minister-gilani-pakistan-bilateral-mee (accessed January 16, 2019).

The Pakistanis pleaded for understanding, meaning delay. Kayani and other Pakistani officials continued to reiterate to their US counterparts that their country was the real target of terrorism, from homegrown and Afghan militants. When pressed, Pakistani officials pointed to the safe havens that these groups enjoyed across the border as evidence of greater Afghan culpability, rather than specific culpability on their part.[803] Kayani had even shared a lengthy memo with President Obama that in part accused the United States of seeking destabilization in Pakistan as part of its strategy for Afghanistan.[804] In response to the latest pressure from Allen and others, Kayani promised military action in 2012 but pleaded patience, citing ongoing struggles with other insurgent groups in the FATA.[805] Even the Quetta Shura Taliban tried to distance itself from Islamabad and seemingly the Haqqani Network. Mullah Omar used his Eid message, traditionally a venue to encourage fighters, to rebut claims of Pakistani support for the insurgency.[806]

However, this time, Pakistan was less able to delay the consequences. The Obama Administration faced increased public pressure to formally declare the Haqqanis a terrorist entity. Their key operational leader Badruddin Haqqani had finally been included on the list on May 11, 2011, but not the network as a whole, to the disbelief of many observers.[807] This became increasingly untenable politically throughout 2011 after the series of high-profile attacks. Senator Richard Burr introduced the widely supported

[803] For example, see comments of Lieutenant General Talaat Masood, in Kunwar Khuldune Shahid, "The Return of the Pakistani Taliban," *The Diplomat* (October 8, 2019).
[804] Markey, 168.
[805] Personal experience of the author, Allen-Kayani meetings in March-April 2012.
[806] Jeffrey Dressler, "For Mullah Omar, This Eid is Different," *Institute for the Study of War* Backgrounder (November 10, 2011), 1.
[807] U.S. Department of State, "Designation of Haqqani Commander Badruddin Haqqani" (May 11, 2011), https://2009-2017.state.gov/r/pa/prs/ps/2011/05/163021.htm (accessed October 9, 2017).

Haqqani Network Terrorist Designation Act in December 2011. As it happened, Pakistan's link to the group had actually further delayed action. The Obama Administration had been concerned that given those links to Pakistan, a terrorist designation would necessarily implicate the Pakistani military and intelligence services as well.[808] A public rupture with Pakistan would also harm the civilian Zardari administration, perhaps fatally, and potentially lead to a less-cooperative government in the next elections. Third, there had been hope that as an arm of the Taliban with more centralization and closer ties to Pakistan than the Quetta Shura, the Haqqani network could be a reliable interlocutor to negotiate an end to the war. A terrorist designation would make it radioactive. However, despite these standing policy hurdles, the Obama Administration finally designated the Haqqani network as a Foreign Terrorist Organization (as well as a Specially Designated Global Terrorist Entity) in September 2012, three years after the surge began.

The United States also began to assume more bilateral risk in taking action against the Haqqanis directly in Pakistan. Over the course of the Afghan insurgency, the leadership and operations of Jalaluddin Haqqani's organization had been taken over by his sons, primarily Badruddin and Sirajuddin. Sirajuddin Haqqani was the network's military leader as his father stepped away from operations, and succeeded him as overall leader when he died. His younger brother Badruddin served as his deputy and the group's operational chief.[809] The US had been reluctant to conduct unilateral attacks on the Haqqanis not just because of the civilian casualties and the violation of Pakistan's

[808] Personal experience with NSC Deputies Committee meetings, February 2012-March 2012.
[809] Bill Roggio, "Taliban confirm death of Badruddin Haqqani in drone strike last year," *The Long War Journal* (September 8, 2013), http://www.longwarjournal.org/archives/2013/09/taliban_confirm-_deat_1.php (accessed June 21, 2016).

airspace, but because Pakistani military or intelligence personnel might be present. In August 2012, Badruddin was finally killed in a US drone strike in the Shawal Valley. Perhaps as a result of the pressure applied by the United States, Islamabad did not condemn the attack as a violation of its sovereignty, as it often did when Afghan Taliban targets were killed by US forces in Pakistan.[810]

Consolidation, 2013-2016

In retrospect, 2012 was the high water mark of confrontation. Taliban fortunes were at their lowest and international pressure on both them and their sponsor was at its most intense. A standoff with Pakistan that might have resulted in a strategic shift earlier had been delayed almost to the end of the war, and indeed already when the Americans were on their way out. A combination of factors served to improve US-Pakistani relations beginning in mid-2012. First, the ground supply route for troops in Afghanistan through Pakistan reopened after being closed for six months, spurred by a coalition summit in Chicago in May and intensive bilateral engagement.[811] Second, US forces in Afghanistan began to draw down and transition security to the local Afghan security forces, decreasing the military urgency of halting Pakistan's power projection. US troop levels reached their peak of 98,000 in 2011 before declining to 90,000 in 2012, 63,000 in 2013, and 37,000 in 2014, when ISAF officially disbanded. Obama continued to promise that all would depart by the end of his second term in office in 2016, though over nine

[810] See, for example, Mujib Mashal, "Taliban Chief Targeted by Drone Strike in Pakistan, Signaling a U.S. Shift, *The New York Times* (May 22, 2016), http://www.nytimes.com/2016/05/23/world/asi-a/afghanistan-taliban-leader-mullah-mansour-.html (accessed June 10, 2016).
[811] "Pakistan reopens NATO supply lines to Afghanistan," *CNN* (July 3, 2012), https://www.cnn.com/-2012/07/03/world/asia/us-pakistan-border-routes/index.html (accessed June 11, 2016).

thousand would remain.[812] And at the same time international forces were declining, indigenous ones were as well. Afghan national security forces, which at their peak numbered 352,000, were decreasing to a level of 282,000 partially as a result of a reduction in US support.

Third, the Pakistani election of May 2013 brought in a new civilian government led by veteran politician Nawaz Sharif as Prime Minister. Sharif had proven in the past willing to try and rein in the military and made gestures towards improving ties with Kabul. He attended the inauguration of India's prime minister in May 2014, and worked on resuming a strategic dialogue. He also sought to improve relations with the United States. His election was greeted warmly by President Obama, who promised to be "fully supportive" of Sharif's continued success in his work. The White House issued a statement praising the close security partnership between the two countries during a summit in October, and the White House spokesman said the US was "optimistic" about the future. During a January 2014 meeting with her counterpart, National Security Advisor Susan Rice released a similarly upbeat readout of her meeting, focusing on the strengthening of bilateral ties and promoting peace in the region.

Significantly, this warming took place without either appreciable improvements on the battlefield in Afghanistan or action against the Haqqani network and other Afghan Taliban at home. Pakistan at last initiated its much-heralded operation against militants in North Waziristan in June 2014 after a devastating TTP attack against Karachi's airport. General Raheel Sharif, who replaced Kayani as Chief of the Army Staff and who had

[812] The White House, "Statement by the President on Afghanistan" (May 27, 2014), https://obamawhitehouse.archives.gov/the-press-office/2014/05/27/statement-president-afghanistan (accessed January 17, 2019).

launched the campaign, visited the United States in 2014 in a sign of improved cooperation.[813] But the campaign in North Waziristan ignored the Haqqani network and other Afghan-centered groups. Militants were warned in advance that an offensive was coming, and senior personnel relocated themselves to other agencies, across the border, and to Pakistan proper.[814]

This thaw could also not disguise that Pakistan had largely sustained its key policy goals through the high water mark of the US campaign. These had been codified along two axes, the military and the political. First, the US had begun negotiating with the Afghan government about America's post-2014 military presence and the process of handing over security responsibilities to the Afghans. As it moved closer towards self-sufficiency, Afghanistan's leadership was concerned about balancing internal sovereignty with a defense against Pakistan. It was focused on acquiring high-end military technology like tanks and aircraft that would posture Afghanistan against a conventional threat from its neighbors.[815] These mostly did not come. The US preferred supplying Kabul with counterinsurgency equipment less useful for countering peer competitors, which suited Pakistan fine. The United States and Afghanistan had also signed a Strategic Partnership Agreement on May 2, 2012, which set the groundwork for a functional military relationship in the future. Negotiations for a follow-on agreement began in November, but were stymied by the US announcement of direct peace talks with

[813] Tim Craig, "Pakistani Army Chief's trip to U.S. likely to be marked by greater optimism, trust" *The Washington Post* (November 14, 2014), https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/asia_pacific/pakistani-army-chiefs-trip-to-us-likely-to-be-marked-by-greater-optimism-trust/2014/11/13/427374e8-6aa1-11e4-a31c-77759fc1eacc_story.html?utm_term=.4ae2d0997d0b (accessed September 14, 2017).
[814] International Crisis Group (2015), 4.
[815] Joshua Partlow, "Afghanistan set to get huge supply of military gear," *The Washington Post* (August 23, 2011), https://www.washingtonpost.com/blogs/checkpoint-washington/post/afghanistan-set-to-get-massive-supply-of-military-gear/2011/08/22/gIQA7ovWYJ_blog.html?utm_term=.771ffaba8459 (accessed October 8, 2017).

the Taliban in Doha. One of the enduring sticking points was the Afghan desire for a security guarantee against potential aggression by outside powers – implicitly, Pakistan. In the text, finalized in November 2013 and initialed by Afghanistan's new president Ashraf Ghani in September 2014, this demand was abandoned.

Then there was Afghanistan's choice of leader. Ghani was a relatively safe successor to Karzai for Pakistan, which was certainly not unhappy to see Karzai go. "The recent developments in Afghanistan," said the Pakistani foreign ministry after the election, "offer a unique opportunity to transform the bilateral ties and build a strong and forward-looking relationship."[816] Karzai and officials like the departed intelligence chief Saleh had often accused Pakistan of supporting the Taliban, and Pakistan suspected Karzai's administration had – at best – turned a blind eye towards TTP militants using Afghanistan as a safe haven.[817] The new President Ghani, a Pashtun, had spoken about the need to improve relations with Pakistan and was far preferable to the losing candidate, Abdullah Abdullah. Abdullah was considered a Tajik through both his mother's heritage and long association with Northern Alliance figures like the late Ahmed Shah Massoud. An Abdullah government would have been precisely what Pakistan feared: not just a pro-Western government, but likely a pro-Indian one as well. During a runoff election in June, there were widespread reports of Taliban fighters encouraging citizens to support Ghani in the southern Pashtun areas, closest to Pakistan,

[816] Aoun Sahi and Shashank Bengali, "Afghan President Ashraf Ghani in Pakistan to repair ties," *Los Angeles Times* (November 14, 2014), http://www.latimes.com/wor-ld/afghanistan-pakistan/la-fg-afghanistan-pakistan-20141114-story.html (accessed May 18, 2016).
[817] For example, Joshua Partlow, "Karzai accuses Pakistan of supporting terrorists," *The Washington Post* (October 3, 2011), https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/karzai-criticizes-pakistan-for-supporting-terrorists/2011/10/03/gIQAWABWIL_story.html?utm_term=.ba977ab35d49 (accessed October 21, 2017).

where voter turnout spiked dramatically.[818] This paid off, and Ghani took power on September 21. Shortly after taking office, he signed the Bilateral Security Agreement Karzai had negotiated with the United States, but without the paragraph on alliances that had enraged the Pakistanis. Ghani visited Pakistan in November 2014 to improve relations, and also dropped Karzai's long-running request to buy Indian weapons.[819] Pakistan subsequently indicated to its proxies that it was willing to allow the Taliban to negotiate with Kabul, which warmed ties between Quetta and Islamabad.

Neither Pakistan's strategic gains nor its relaxation of tensions with both the Americans and Afghans reduced the pressure the Taliban put on Kabul in 2015. The drawdown of US forces and the withdrawal from counter-Taliban combat meant the Taliban could shift tactics again, away from the Haqqanis' guerilla warfare and closer to the conventional warfare with which it had experimented in the earlier days of the insurgency. Organizationally, the Quetta Shura Taliban was moving further and further away from the kind of local militias that had seen it through the first decade of the war and focusing on developing larger formations of mobile, "professional" Taliban, full-time, who did not hail from the area where they fought.[820] These more competent fighters helped it work towards capturing larger-scale objectives key territory like district centers and cities.[821]

The most emblematic symbol of this new phase of the war came when the Taliban overran the city of Kunduz in September 2015 with a reported 7,000 troops, the

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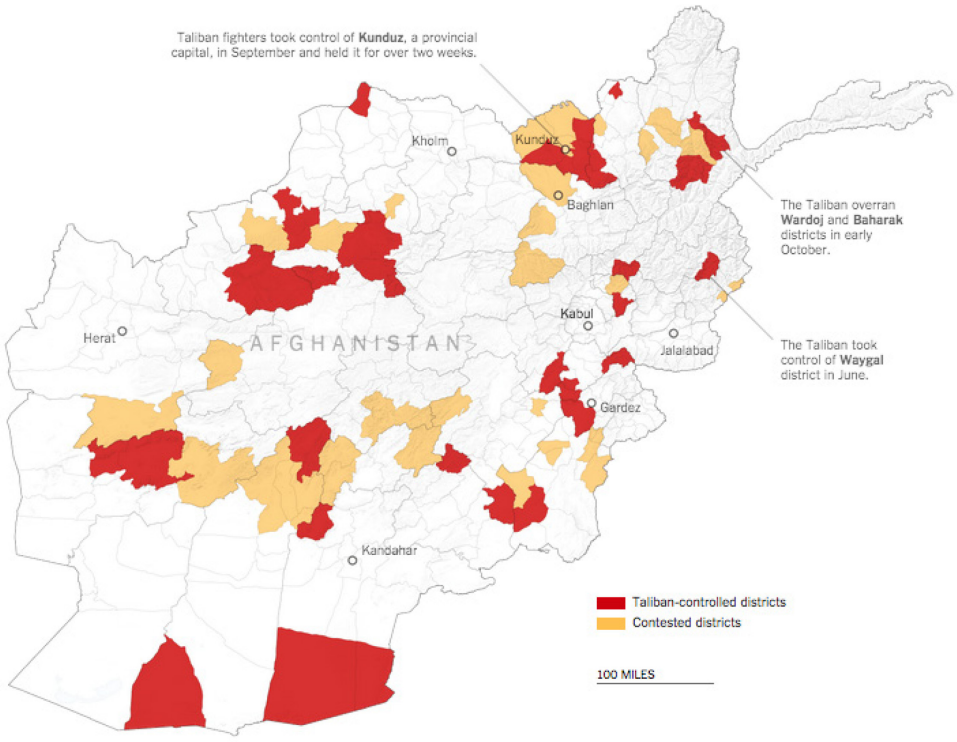
[818] International Crisis Group, *Afghanistan's Political Transition*, Asia Report N°260 (October 16, 2014), 18, 30, http://www.crisisgroup.org/~/media/Files/asia/south-asia/afghanistan/260-afghanistan-s-political-transition.pdf (accessed May 17, 2016).
[819] Alan Kronstadt, "Pakistan-U.S. Relations: Issues for the 114th Congress," *Congressional Research Service* R44034 (May 14, 2015), 8.
[820] Giustazzi (2019), 227.
[821] Giustazzi (2019), 222-223.

culmination of a five-month campaign. Afghan forces were only able to retake the city after two weeks of intense fighting, including a US airstrike that killed twenty-two people at an international hospital. Another hotly contested area was central Helmand, including the 2010 surge's original goal of Marjah. A major Taliban offensive in October was barely contained by the Afghan 215th Corps, which could not retake all of the ground the Taliban had captured. Northern Helmand was essentially lost. By January, a very conservative estimate by the US Defense Department admitted that the Taliban controlled nine of Afghanistan's 404 districts and had influence in 17 others.[822] This was almost certainly low. Pakistani estimates suggested the Taliban controlled 55-60 percent of Afghanistan, the most territory to date.[823]

In the east, along its facilitation routes, the Haqqani network was reaching its all-time high military strength of an estimated 50,000 troops, of which 20,000 were full time and with 3,000-6,000 reserves mobilized at any time. This was still relatively small, compared to an overall Taliban strength of over 200,000.[824] What there was not, however, was the series of high-profile attacks in Kabul that in 2008 and 2011 had threatened to fundamentally alter the strategic relationship between the US and Pakistan. The Haqqani network launched a grenade attack against Kabul airport in July 2014 and a complex attack against the Afghan Parliament in June 2015, for which the Afghan government blamed the ISI.[825] Those were the only high-profile actions taken, however. Instead, Haqqani activities bled more into the broader Quetta Shura strategy, following

[822] U.S. Department of Defense, "Press Briefing by Gen. Shoffner via Teleconference from Afghanistan," (January 19, 2016), https://www.defense.gov/Newsroom/Transcripts/Transcript/Article/643571/department-of-defense-press-briefing-by-gen-shoffner-via-teleconference-from-af/ (accessed January 20, 2019).
[823] Giustazzi (2019), 233.
[824] Giustazzi (2019), 86.
[825] "Mapping Militant Organizations: Haqqani Network," *Stanford University* (Last modified July 2018), https://cisac.fsi.stanford.edu/mappingmilitants/profiles/haqqani-network (accessed June 12, 2020).

Sirajuddin Haqqani appointment as the Taliban's deputy military commander. After the death of Mullah Omar's successor Mullah Mansur in 2016, Sirajuddin effectively increased the assault on cities, assaulting Helmand's capital Lashkar Gah, Uruzgan's capital Tarin Kot, and again Kunduz.[826]



Source: *The New York Times*/Long War Journal (October 2015)

The overall security situation incurred some policy changes by the United States towards Afghanistan but not Pakistan. President Obama, who had hoped to draw down US forces to an embassy protection detachment by the end of his administration, was forced to announce in October 2015 that the US would keep 9,800 troops in Afghanistan through the entirety of 2016. They would also return to performing direct combat roles

[826] Giustazzi (2019), 252.

against the Taliban.[827] The withdrawal would remain aspirational: when the Trump Administration took office, the 8,500 troops remained.

Relations between Pakistan and the United States became even more cordial, despite the Quetta Shura Taliban's successes. By and large, US statements on Pakistan remained positive, emphasizing the need for improving the bilateral economic relationship.[828] President Obama himself muted the calls to end sanctuaries for militant groups in an October 2015 meeting with Pakistan's prime minister and did not reference the Haqqanis at all. Instead, the joint statement linked the sanctuary issue with border security, a more technical issue with less culpability.[829] In fact, few serious actions had been taken against either the Haqqanis or militancy more broadly. The United States had commended the Pakistanis' late great assault on North Waziristan, even though the Haqqani network had largely been left undisturbed.[830] During a visit by Secretary of State John Kerry to Pakistan in January 2015, Kerry "commended Pakistan's resolve" in fighting terrorism, as well as the "comprehensive" and "robust" steps being taken.[831] At the March 2016 ministerial session of the bilateral Strategic Dialogue, he went further, calling Pakistan an "essential partner." In fact, even as the Obama Administration was

[827] Vanda Felbab-Brown, "Blood and Faith in Afghanistan: A June 2014 Update," *The Brookings Institution* (June 2016), 6-7, https://www.brookings.edu/wp-content/uploads/2016/06/Felbab-Brown-Paper-BLOOD-AND-FAITH-IN-AFGHANISTAN-May-2016.pdf (accessed October 20, 2017).
[828] For example, The White House, "2015 Joint Statement by President Barack Obama and Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif" (October 22, 2015), https://obamawhitehouse.archives.gov/the-press-office/2015/10/22/-2015-joint-statement-president-barack-obama-and-prime-minister-nawaz (accessed January 22, 2019), or U.S. Department of State, "U.S.-Pakistan Strategic Dialogue Joint Statement" (January 13, 2015), https://2009-2017.state.gov/r/pa/prs/ps/2015/01/235881.htm (accessed January 21, 2019).
[829] The White House, "2015 Joint Statement by President Barack Obama and Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif" (October 22, 2015), https://obamawhitehouse.archives.gov/the-press-office/2015/10/22/2015-joint-statement-president-barack-obama-and-prime-minister-nawaz (accessed January 22, 2019).
[830] U.S. Department of State, "Country Reports on Terrorism, 2014" (June 2015), 299, https://www.state.-gov/documents/organization/239631.pdf (accessed October 9, 2017).
[831] U.S. Department of State, "U.S.-Pakistan Strategic Dialogue Joint Statement" (January 13, 2015), https://2009-2017.state.gov/r/pa/prs/ps/2015/01/235881.htm (accessed January 21, 2019).

altering course and increasing the amount of troops that would remain in Afghanistan because of unsatisfactory progress in the war, other officials were citing cooperation from Pakistan against networks like al-Qaeda and the Haqqanis.[832] But the Pakistanis eventually shelved Kerry's key request to sanction the Haqqani network. Though anonymous Pakistani officials claimed that the Haqqani network would be officially banned as part of a crackdown on terrorist financing, no formal designation was ever made for the Haqqanis or other "good" groups like Lashkar-e Taiba.[833] Additional punitive sanctions on Pakistan did not materialize.

III. Conclusion and Additional Analysis

Donald Trump had campaigned on a promise to end the war in Afghanistan. In 2017, his second national security advisor H.R. McMaster apocryphally talked him out of it. In this McMaster was supported by Jim Mattis and Rex Tillerson, the Secretaries of Defense and State, and virtually the entirety of the foreign policy establishment of Washington. Instead of retreat the Afghans got a mini-surge added to Obama's remnant force. Pakistan at last faced a cutoff of almost all foreign aid in January of 2018, which the Trump Administration said would resume only when it took verifiable steps to end the sanctuaries enjoyed by the Haqqani network and the Quetta Shura Taliban on its territory. It was far too late. The incentive of such a stoppage was unlikely to overcome compromises made in the war's endgame, which Trump signaled repeatedly he wanted

[832] The White House, "Press Call by Senior Administration Officials on Afghanistan" (July 6, 2016), https://obamawhitehouse.archives.gov/the-press-office/2016/07/06/press-call-senior-administration-officials-afghanistan (accessed January 20, 2019).
[833] Zahid Gishkori, "212 organizations formally banned by Pakistan," *The Express Tribune* (June 28, 2015), http://tribune.com.pk/story/911295/212-organisations-formally-banned-by-pakistan/ (accessed May 2, 2016).

sooner rather than later. And in any case the problem of Pakistani support had waned in relative terms. Other states were increasingly dumping money and materiel into the Taliban, predominantly Iran. The Islamic Republic had begun to invest significant sums and manpower from the Revolutionary Guards into making various Taliban elements more lethal, sometimes in cooperation with Pakistan and sometimes not. The Islamic State had also established a presence, drawing support from its other branches and donors in the Persian Gulf while it warred with both the Afghan government and the Taliban. But the consequences for Pakistan had at least finally been implemented. That such a step had been delayed nearly until the war's third decade was remarkable, a testament to Pakistan's effective proxy strategy.

Largely because of this strategy, Pakistan achieved its strategic goals. Above all, Kabul would not be a meaningful Indian ally. Indeed, despite India's development of a transshipment port at Iran's Chabahar port, Ashraf Ghani had dropped Karzai's flirtation with India as a strategic balancer or even partner. Afghanistan would certainly not be strong enough to chart an independent foreign policy. Peripheral Pakistani militant groups like Lashkar-e Taiba also retained freedom of action in Afghanistan, usually plugged into the friendly Haqqani network, and remained a threat to unfriendly targets. Pashtun separatism was not a serious threat. Unrest did persist, admittedly, in wide swaths of the borderlands and radicalism in Pakistan proper. But that was partially related to the passive support strategy Pakistan had adopted years earlier, and thus at least a semi-conscious tradeoff. Critically, Pakistan also avoided most American repercussions, even when US efforts in Afghanistan were at their peak from 2010 to

2012. It was never listed as a state sponsor of terror and never received less than $1 billion per year in US total aid through 2016.

These successes were a triumph of the proxy doctrine that the state had developed decades earlier, particularly the passive support of militant groups and their sustainment through religious and social institutions. This was the defining feature of the Pakistan's support to the Quetta Shura. The Haqqani network, which also benefited from these institutions, was characterized by closer operational support from the state that helped make it more capable of spectacular high-end attacks. This was the Haqqanis' defining competency on the battlefield and feature as a proxy. Support came in several direct forms. Pakistani officers supported the group with weapons, funding, and training; connected them with capable foreign groups, like al-Qaeda; they cleared checkpoints for raids; and allegedly, on occasion, joined in operations. Some of this active support was observable by the United States and its allies, and far more than the passive support drove the two nations towards a confrontation. As such, the Haqqani network remained the major strategic liability for Islamabad in prosecuting the war, due to the relatively close ties between the two and the spectacular attacks the Haqqanis would carry out. Under Jalaladin Haqqani and then even more under his son Sirajuddin, the Haqqani network turned into something like the Afghan al-Qaeda, holding little land but able to bring the war to American television screens and Senate hearings. It was an al-Qaeda with fingerprints, relatively large ones, that the US could glimpse and then on which the US could focus its accusations of Pakistani duplicity. This danger was evident in the ebbs and flows of the US-Pakistan relationship, which closely tracked the most visible operations of the Haqqani network, usually those against Kabul. The network's liability

was greatest in the significant deterioration of Pakistan's relationship with the US between mid-2008 to 2009 and mid-2011 to 2012. Both periods came after a succession of high-profile Haqqani attacks. The bilateral US-Pakistan relationship correlated with those periods more closely than the fortunes of the actual war and the ensuing jeopardy of Washington's policy goals. If all of Pakistan's proxies had enjoyed the same degree of direct support, the United States might well have taken more vigorous action earlier against their sponsor.

And it was not worth it: the risk to Pakistan for its Haqqani relationship far outweighed the benefit. Certainly, there was some value the Haqqanis could attract in the form of media attention by attacking protected targets, like their prolonged siege of the US Embassy in the center of Kabul. This was classic insurgent doctrine: creating a crisis of legitimacy by demonstrating that the state was incapable of keeping order. Though such high profile attacks might only affect a tiny portion of the battlefield, the overall effect was to shape the media narrative and denude the will to fight among the counterinsurgent. However, in this case, the attention these attacks generated sparked debate about balancing actions and direct reprisals against their sponsors. In Admiral Mullen's 2011 testimony, an important heuristic of the shift in American attitudes towards Pakistan, the Haqqani network had been the major data point suggesting Pakistani culpability for America's trouble in Afghanistan. These attacks highlighted a relationship between proxy and sponsor that became a major driver of possible US policy shifts towards a harder bilateral position. Perhaps the main driver.

There was not even really a military logic to using the Haqqanis as a proxy. Throughout the entirety of the US military presence, the Afghan Taliban projected power

sufficiently for Pakistan to achieve its policy objectives. They successfully contested American offensives during key phases in 2007-2008 and 2010-2011 in areas like Marjah. Their links to Pakistan were more difficult to pin down and less clearly tied to their operational output. Because there was less active Pakistani assistance with the Quetta Shura Taliban, repercussions against Pakistan were less directly tied to their military operations, making them a more effective proxy. By the end of Operation Enduring Freedom, the Afghan Taliban – and Pakistan – were in a stronger position to influence the political future of Afghanistan than at any point since 2001.

Was there a difference in the utility for Pakistan in the goals the Quetta Shura Taliban would have pursued without Islamabad's support for the Haqqani network? Certainly, given their closer local ties to Afghanistan and their comparative lack of funding from Pakistan, the Quetta Shura was a less politically responsive proxy. Their presence on the ground in Afghanistan gave them increased independence, and probably that would translate to a more independent government in Kabul than one dominated by the Haqqani network. But two points mitigated this danger. First, the Quetta Shura would dominate postwar Afghanistan anyway, should the Afghan Taliban win. There was no scenario where the government in Kabul would be decisively shaped by the Haqqani network, nor had it been before 2001. It was too small, too regional, and not tied sufficiently to the population to be able to govern nationally. Indeed, the Haqqanis' guerilla tactics – and especially the al-Qaeda-like tactics favored by Sirajuddin Haqqani and Arab militants – had not deepened the national reservoir of support for the group. The opposite, if anything. And secondly, there was no evidence that the modern Taliban would show more independence from key Pakistani goals than the Taliban of yesteryear,

which had been a reliable ally. Not a proxy, and not a puppet, but an ally. And after two decades sheltering under the Pakistani wing, why would that change?

Pakistan's relationship with the Haqqani network might have been a liability, but that was not to suggest that a US confrontation would necessarily have changed Pakistan's strategic policy. It was not clear that if the maximum had been threatened and implemented earlier – a cutoff of aid, designating Pakistan a state sponsor of terrorism, some embrace with the Indians – the key Pakistani institutions would have changed course and acceded to US demands. Reversing a three-decade long policy of supporting Islamic  tants, to say nothing of a doctrine of asymmetric warfare dating back to 1947, was a tall order for a military at war. And there were built-in limits to any such confrontation. A key lever Pakistan could hold over the head of the US was the ground supply corridor for the war effort, the so-called GLOC, which was closed in November 2011 after a friendly(ish) fire incident at Salala. But even this was not dispositive. About thirty percent of NATO supplies passed through the GLOC, the majority of which was fuel. With it closed, these supplies were forced to use other routes, including a constellation of shipping methods through several central Asian states, the Caucasus, and Russia. The premium for this rerouting was about $90-$100 million per month.[834] That was a significant figure, but not insurmountable for a war effort that was costing the US over $100 billion per year during this period.[835] And at the time the shutdown happened, the Obama Administration was at the peak of its surge force. Strategic victory, to say

[834] Luis Martinez, "Afghanistan War: Closed Pakistan Routes Costing U.S. $100 Million a Month," *ABC News* (June 13, 2012), https://abcnews.go.com/blogs/politics/2012/06/afghanistan-war-closed-pakistan-routes-costing-u-s-100-million-a-month (accessed August 29, 2020).
[835] Neta Crawford, "United States Budgetary Costs and Obligations of Post-9/11 Wars through FY2020: $6.4 Trillion," *Brown University Costs of War Research Series* (November 13, 2019), https://watson.brown.edu/costsofwar/files/cow/imce/papers/2019/US%20Budgetary%20Costs%20of%20Wars%20November%202019.pdf (accessed August 30, 2020), 7.

nothing of election victory, was certainly a priority. There is no evidence that military operations were shifted as a result of the closure, nor that strategic policy changed, nor that supplies needed for the fight never reached Afghanistan. If anything the GLOC closure would have affected the withdrawal of equipment during the drawdown in Afghanistan when it came, but by that point the route was long since open. And even during the GLOC crisis the US had more leverage than it believed. For example, a key element in reopening the GLOC was the massive loss of revenue to the Pakistani military-industrial complex. It was not clear at all which side, in extremis, would buckle first.

Two issues complicated the "confrontation" strategy, however, even if it had been adopted. First, the potential policy costs stemming from a US-Pakistani confrontation were not spread out evenly among Pakistani decisionmakers. The Pakistani military would have been hurt relatively less by a cutoff in foreign aid than the civilian government and it arguably gained relatively more by its proxy war. This likely contributed to an internally broken cost-benefit analysis of strategy. Since the military had the lion's share of control over national security and proxy war questions anyway, it would have fought hard and perhaps successfully against a change. Second, it was not clear that Pakistani aid was definitively necessary to the Taliban's success. Had it been cut off, would the Taliban have been successful? It was probably critical for the Haqqani network's ability to conduct high-profile attacks, and also important to rebuild the Quetta Shura Taliban's strength in the early days of the insurgency. Those madrassahs and rear areas in Pakistan certainly remained important recruiting zones, helping to replenish numbers as the year-in, year-out fighting ground away at the Taliban. This was an

important point about the Afghan insurgency – or almost any insurgency, for that matter, but particularly one in a land so alien to the counterinsurgent. It was a numbers game. The Afghan Taliban could rely on numbers to wear away the Americans' will to achieve more and more blurry policy objectives. By the end of ISAF's mandate, the Taliban was estimated to have 200,000 total members, who cost far less and were far more convenient to field than American forces were for the Americans.

Admittedly, this falls into a broader critique about modern counterinsurgency theory and its downplaying of the critical factor of time. For the purposes of this argument, however, the consequences of an earlier Pakistani confrontation are also irrelevant. This is not meant to be a "roads untaken" analysis of the Afghanistan war. It is instead meant to argue that Pakistan's utility in supporting the Haqqani network – the return on its investment – was low, perhaps even negative. And even if a US confrontation with Pakistan would not have ended Pakistan's support for proxies, it would have significantly decreased the utility of the Haqqanis as a proxy in cost-benefit terms. The penalties enacted by Pakistan's major balancer would have made its Afghan policy far more expensive, possibly too much more expensive, but less efficacious in any case.

Without question, Pakistan's two-track proxy doctrine and institutional support for the Afghan Taliban had a cost of its own. Its secondary support system – its more robust strategic tool – incurred costs of a different type. The same social institutions Zia set up to help fight the Soviet war and change Pakistani society retained the policy preferences they were created with, even as time passed and the state evolved. The policy preferences of the madrassahs and tribal communities in North and South

Waziristan reflected many of Zia's preferences, fewer of Musharraf's, and fewer still of Benazir Bhutto's and Sharif's. Unlike the Afghan Arabs in places like Chechnya, it was not that the same fighters would attack both Afghanistan and Pakistan (though some like Nazir and Bahadar did), but that the institutions that supported one were blunt and bled over into militants who did both. With policy preferences of their own, those same institutions then effectively punished Pakistan when it attempted to pursue policies its proxies opposed, like exerting more sovereignty over the FATA or cracking down on Islamic radicalism. And since they were more indirectly supported, the Pakistani state had less ability to change their goals in real time.

Eventually, the institutions and policies that effectively supported insurgency in Afghanistan against the Soviets and helped regenerate the Afghan Taliban posed a threat to Pakistan itself. However, even this threat could help Pakistan project power. Pakistan could deflect US accusations of complicity and apathy towards the militants by pleading weakness and by pointing to a lack of capability both operational and political. The weakness of the central government in controlling organs of the security forces was a component of Pakistani deniability and a US excuse for inaction. And indeed, there was some truth to that. Its troops were often ineffective in countering the militant threat in the FATA, which eventually expanded into KPK and Pakistan's major cities. That failure regularly provoked the question among potential balancers: were frontier areas like North Waziristan safe havens – was Pakistan powerless – or were they sanctuaries – was Pakistan complicit? An argument that took time to resolve, even if the answer was the former.

Herein lay the main value of Pakistan's close relationship with the Haqqani network: to mitigate the fallout from Pakistan's own domestic militants while its Afghan militants made the strategic gains. Jalaluddin Haqqani had decades of experience in Islamist militancy and the profile to match. His network was both one of the most experienced and respected Afghan Taliban groups and the faction closest to the Pakistani state. It was thus a way to mediate with other militants and moderate their agency when their policy priorities differed from Pakistan's. This would prove critically helpful during Pakistan's military campaigns in South and North Waziristan.

It would not have worked, of course, without Pakistan's own long history with the Haqqani network. This illustrated one of the advantages provided by Pakistani military doctrine and its active experience with proxies: it lowered the friction of war. Among other things, proxy warfare required a level of trust on each side of the relationship. The sponsor had to trust that the proxy would act according to enough of its objectives that arming it will be worthwhile, and in this case the proxy had to trust the sponsor not to turn against it when its attention and combat power is elsewhere. In Pakistan, there were operational pathways for proxy war that were already well established in institutions like the ISI and experienced officers, which was not something that could be established overnight. Pakistan and much of the Afghan Taliban had such a relationship: with the Quetta Shura, since 1994 (even accepting that many of the personnel were different), and with the Haqqani network since the Soviet war. Many Pakistani military officers had had experience with the Afghan war and the mujahedin and the ways in which they were supported. Some of them had fought inside Afghanistan itself. These techniques were not lost in the intervening decade-and-a-half, but absorbed partially by the Kashmir

uprising and the Taliban campaign. This served to reduce the cost of restarting proxy warfare after the Taliban's 2001 defeat. Pakistan's passive experience with proxies was helpful also. The fact that major political parties like JI (and to a lesser extent, JUI) were tied to the engagement with and protection of militant Islamists was an operational boon to them. It lowered deniability somewhat – for example, when senior militant leaders like Hafiz Saeed would make public appearances with mainstream political figures – but it also reassured proxies that Pakistan would not turn on them. It also reassured them that announced campaigns against Islamism and radicalism would likely be short-lived, since the political costs the parties could inflict were significant.

The broader effect of relationships like these and Pakistan's proxy doctrine came in two parts. First, it exacerbated the Pakistani military's autonomous role in national security policy, a consequence of proxy war since 1947. Because few army and ISI officers knew the full extent of Pakistani operations, to say nothing of civilians, the military's accountability was diminished and political oversight became more challenging. The first Kashmir war had thrust army officers into a policymaking role and degraded the military's chain of command. Then, the issue had been circumventing the army's British officers, including the chief of staff. The Soviet war accentuated this issue, since a growing portion of Pakistani operations were being conducted with some secrecy by proxies and its supporting army elements. If the first two Kashmir wars had been relatively surgical proxy interventions, the expansion of Pakistan's proxy war capabilities under Zia during the Soviet war fundamentally shifted Pakistani attention and material weight towards asymmetric operations. Did this autonomous role help Pakistan wage more effective proxy war? Yes, certainly. It may have led to an internally broken

cost-benefit assessment and societal consequences, but it enabled the government's deniability and deterred consequences. During the US war in Afghanistan, and certainly during the height of the surge post-Musharraf, it was well to Pakistan's benefit that elements of the military were operating beyond the control of the central government. This increased the government's deniability and delayed, if not prevented, harsher US sanctions and responses to Pakistani double-dealing. If Pakistan had a recognizably healthier civil-military relationship, one in which the US recognized Bhutto and then Sharif were waging war against US forces, strategic policy towards their governments would have been much harsher. As it was, blame could be shifted on to the military – and not even the military, really, but just odds and ends from the ISI and retirees.

The second long-term effect of Pakistan's post-Soviet doctrine of asymmetric war was that it fundamentally limited future policy choices. Pakistan had taken a basically instrumental approach to Islamic militancy in the first two Kashmir wars. Though it used the language of Islam to cloak its intervention, there were few societal ramifications from the state's support of militants. In the first Afghanistan war this changed. Pakistan's first support of Afghan militants came under the secular hand of Zulfiqar Bhutto, and it was intended to counter Daoud Khan's regime next door. This was very similar to the approach Pakistan had taken in 1947 and 1965 in Kashmir. But this instrumental intervention came at a time when first Bhutto (for political reasons) and then to a much greater extent Zia (for both political and ideological reasons) were also promoting Islamism as a more concrete national identity for Pakistanis. In the constitution, in rights for minorities, in the metrics of performance for civil servants, and above all in the military, Islam was being emphasized by the state. This included especially the swaths of

religious schools being built in the tribal lands and elsewhere. The "passive track" represented by these social institutions and domestic spending on Islamization resulted in societal changes that would bolster Pakistan's instrumental proxy war during the Soviet conflict yet exist separately from it. This was a key effect of Zia's implicit doctrine: that Zia's Pakistan had invested in societal capabilities of school and mosque that then pursued its own strategic agenda, even to the detriment – and then absorption – of Pakistan's official agenda. Even if institutions were not necessarily captured by militancy, Islamist forces gained enough power to be effective spoilers. This put Pakistan in a different position than Russia or Iran: in effect, the proxies had captured the state.

This was accentuated by the curious ambiguity at the heart of the country. Pakistan was a Muslim state, but was it an Islamic one? Jinnah had left the question unanswered, and the military over two decades had basically punted on the question. Certainly, Pakistan's mobilization around Islam as a political cause had been a long-standing foreign policy of the state. Validating the ideological reason for Pakistan was one of the key motivators for the intervention in Kashmir. Like Pakistan's other linguistic groups, Kashmiris were linked to the state by their religion, and in both of the state's first two conflicts the cause insurgents rallied under was specifically Islamic. The challenge was that given an opening at the top, like under Zia, this wink-wink instrumentalism could blow back on policymakers. The unclear role of Islam that Jinnah had bequeathed to the state created significant political space to change the society and change it rapidly. Strategy followed identity. Regardless of who held power at the

moment in Pakistan, the question of Islam in society had been partially answered, and answered in a different way than Jinnah likely intended.

This analysis is of course reductionist. Certainly, additional factors beyond its connection with the Haqqanis affected Pakistan's domestic militancy, its relationship with the US, and the likelihood of American retaliation. Some of these factors were exogenous, such as the CIA's Ray Davis killing of two men in 2011, a one-off that nonetheless gripped the attention of Pakistanis. The US raid that killed Osama bin Laden near Abbottabad, less than 70 miles from the capital, also hurt US-Pakistani relations, though primarily on the Pakistani side: the US was at pains to play down Pakistan's complicity. Which was curious, since the world's most wanted fugitive hiding for years in a pleasant house near Pakistan's major military academy should have raised questions about its ties to al-Qaeda, the gold standard of Pakistan's counterterrorism cooperation. However, such macro events can be controlled for in Islamabad's relationship with the Haqqanis  he reason that American statements were still relatively positive about Pakistan even in the summer of 2011.

Other elements that were more endogenous to the proxy war also affected the likelihood of US retaliation and thus the effectiveness of Pakistan's proxy warfare. The crisscrossing wars between the TTP, the Afghan Taliban, and other militants illustrated how powerful a related proxy war could be in denuding the overall norm of territorial integrity and subsequently enhanced Pakistan's deniability as a sponsor of militants conducting territorial aggression. Pakistan repeatedly cited Afghanistan's alleged support of the TTP to normalize intelligence suggesting its own role in supporting proxies. These blurred lines were exacerbated by the degree of ethnic fragmentation. The intermingling

of ethnic groups like the Pashtuns, tribes like the Zadran, and families like the Haqqanis along the Afghanistan-Pakistan border decreased accountability for sponsoring militants against either state, since both had historically done so. These cross-border networks also weakened efforts to enforce the border, reducing the normative force of the prohibition against interstate aggression and increasing the deniability of sponsors. The dispute over the Durand line exacerbated this weakness. Since there was no agreed-upon demarcated border, clear violations by proxies and thus actionable examples of interstate aggression were more difficult to identify. This helped power projection by raising the threshold of interstate aggression to a higher level, and allowing smaller violations to go unpunished, which helped protect Pakistan against balancing. At times like 2004 and 2015, the border issue was more prominently raised by Presidents Bush and Obama when overall Afghan-Pakistan (and certainly US-Pakistan) relations were improving, as well as 2008 and 2016 when both presidents were trying to prevent them from deteriorating. It was a helpful excuse. At these moments the technical problem of cooperation at the border could serve as a stand-in for the policy problem of Pakistani proxy warfare. The US could thus blame border cooperation, not Pakistan, for the ongoing insurgency in Afghanistan, and Islamabad would be saved again.

These factors correlated with Pakistan's ability to cloud its relationship to its proxies and may have contributed to the achievement of the state's goals. But it should be acknowledged that at least by 2008, the United States was fully aware of the shell game Pakistan was playing. Why there were not consequences – why Pakistani policy did not change, and was ultimately successful, and US policy ultimately a failure – is the core of this chapter. Potential answers have been suggested here. The new Pakistani

administration, being given the benefit of the doubt. The new Obama administration, just coming in. Continued cooperation on al-Qaeda targets, which were the stuff of US electoral gold and national security priority. The GLOC issue, and so on. However, the success of Pakistan's proxy war, at its core, reflected the effectiveness of the implicit doctrine of two-track proxy war Zia had established. Like the Quetta Shura Taliban, the Haqqani network benefited from the funding and support mechanisms that had begun under Zia, but also saw its capabilities augmented by Pakistani operational support, with more harmful results. This two-tiered structure between Pakistan and the Haqqanis represented a degree of support and control that was more distant than Russia and its Ukrainian and Georgian proxies or Iran and Hezbollah. Their direct operational ties made it a closer relationship than Saudi Arabia and the Chechens, however. The costs incurred by Pakistan in terms of the US relationship and risk of balancing by the more attributable Haqqani operations over the course of the war thus supports this dissertation's hypothesis, that more deniable proxy support makes for more effective proxy warfare.

CHAPTER SIX: SAUDI ARABIA AND THE CHECHENS, 1996-2003

It was Russia's misfortune, in the 1990's, to fight a fractious nation at a time when its own ability to concentrate force was at its weakest. During the first Russian-Chechen war from 1994-1996, radicals supported by Saudi Arabia became an increasingly important influence on the Chechens. The republic's first elected president, Aslan Maskhadov, was forced to make a series of concessions to the growing strength of Islamic fundamentalists who both the Russian and Chechen governments often referred to as "Wahhabis" or "Salafists." By 1999, the new state had become something closer to the Taliban's Afghanistan than an ex-Soviet republic, complete with a declaration of sharia law and public executions.

How that happened is the focus in this case study, which has three parts. First, it will examine the type of ideological and materiel support Saudi Arabia offered to the Chechens. It is the most indirect of the support mechanisms examined here, and thus the most tenuous proxy link. Though Saudi state support did not flow directly to the rebels in this conflict, long-standing Saudi policy supported private sector assistance to Chechnya, including the flow of militants and money, which bolstered the rebels but also changed the nature of the resulting state.[837] The first section will also briefly review the historical context leading up to the establishment of the Chechen state and the second Chechen war. Second, it will examine key moments from 1996-2003 when that strategic support was effective and when it was challenged. This represents the period from the beginning of Chechen independence through the interregnum, when the radicals' influence increased, and then to the effective conclusion of the second Chechen war. Because Saudi Arabia's support was so indirect and thus difficult to assess or isolate, this

[837] Moshe Gammer, "Between Mecca and Moscow: Islam, Politics, and Political Islam in Chechnya and Dagestan" *Middle Eastern Studies* 41 (November 2005): 837.

case will also consider moments when the goals of the Chechen state changed to illustrate the effect of this type of support. Since Saudi Arabia supported the radicals through non-national, pan-Islamic mechanisms, the militants it produced promoted non-national, pan-Islamic policies. The adoption of their pan-Islamic goals by secular Chechens indicates the effect of the support mechanism (rather than Saudi Arabia's own goals, which they sometimes hindered), and will therefore be identified as well as changes in Riyadh's behavior.

These proxies were used against two targets: the secular Chechen rebels and the Russian state. Both the proxies' operational capability and Saudi deniability was high. They repeatedly won combat engagements and soundly defeated their internal and external opponents, forcing the secularists to adopt their goals and the Russians to give them space. Deniability was also high. Though Russia repeatedly blamed Saudi Arabia for sponsoring "Wahhabis," the vast majority of international opprobrium was on Russia for its military actions. Nor did Western balancing in the form of support for Maskhadov's secular government appear, even as the Salafists pressed his government more and more to adopt pan-Islamic goals and the West paid increasing attention to Islamic radicalism. This made the proxies highly effective until 2001. The last section of this chapter will assess the radicals' overall effectiveness and additional factors that affected deniability and the outcome in this case.

I. Origins

Saudi Arabia's support for the Chechen rebels came almost entirely from private sources and often indirectly, making it the most distant relationship of any sponsor and

proxy in this dissertation. The Kingdom's official efforts consisted of mobilizing these sources through means like promoting a domestic pan-Islamic ideology, supporting them with state funds, and normalizing the practice of Saudi citizens going abroad for jihad. The rebels also received support from other Arab states like Qatar, which funded Islamic extremists as well. However, Saudi Arabia was the most active supporter of militancy.[838] These policies were pursued for decades, from the 1960's through at least the terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001. The Saudi fighters who engaged in the Chechen conflict were both those who had fought in the Afghan war and those who joined the jihad afterwards. They were a function of the same basic generating factors in Saudi society. Likewise, some of the Saudi institutions that supported the rebels were created to support the broader pan-Islamic project and some were created for Chechnya specifically.

Russia often described foreign fighters in Chechnya as "Wahhabis" in reference to the conservative brand of Islam in Saudi Arabia that gained prominence in Chechnya after the end of the first war. Wahhabism was named for 18th century preacher Mohammed Ibn Abd-al Wahhab, who had called for the reform of Islam and a return to its doctrinal roots.[839] The Chechen radicals were also sometimes called Salafists, after Salafism, a similarly puritanical reform current in Islam that emerged in the 18th century and was often used interchangeably with Wahhabism.[840] The tenets of Wahhabism and Salafism became a major influence on the Sunni communities of the Caucasus since the

[838] Thomas Hegghammer, "Islamist Violence and Regime Stability in Saudi Arabia," *International Affairs* 84, no. 4 (July 2008): 714.
[839] Bernard Haykel, *Revival and Reform in Islam, The Legacy of Muhammed al-Shawkani* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 128.
[840] Domitilla Sagramoso, "Violence and Conflict in the Russian North Caucasus," *International Affairs* 83, no. 4 (July 2007): 695.

early 1990's.[841] In Chechnya, their adherents demanded the establishment of sharia law and more explicitly religious morals for social issues like the role of women.[842]

Wahhabism had deep roots in the Saudi state. Ibn Wahhab's alliance with the Saud family in the central Arabian Peninsula was critical to the eventual emergence of modern Saudi Arabia. In the 1960's, the royal family's legitimacy came under pressure from the revolutionary Arab ideologies of Baathism and Nasserism. In response, King Fahd adopted a pan-Islamic foreign policy, which attacked the fundamentally atheistic roots of Arab socialism and encouraged private and semi-private institution building.[843] Transnational Islamic institutions like the Muslim World League and the Organization of the Islamic Conference were founded in Saudi Arabia during the 1960's and served as both tools and symbols of Saudi foreign policy.[844] The International Islamic Relief Organization was founded by the League in the years afterwards and would later serve as a key conduit for funds supporting Sunni militancy.[845] By the end of the 1960's Saudi Arabia hosted the world's greatest concentration of Islamic organizations.[846] After oil prices spiked following the 1973 Arab-Israeli war, these institutions became flush with cash, and as their programs expanded Saudi political and religious influence did as well.[847]

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[841] Sagramoso, 694.
[842] Ilyas Akhmadov and Miriam Lanskoy, *The Chechen Struggle: Independence Won and Lost* (New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2010), 31.
[843] Madawi al-Rasheed, *A History of Saudi Arabia*, (London: Cambridge University Press, 2002), 123; Abdullah Sindi, "King Faisal and Pan-Islamism," in *King Faisal and the Modernisation of Saudi Arabia*, ed. Willard Beling (London: Croom Helm, 1980), 184, 191.
[844] Oliver Roy, *The Failure of Political Islam* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1994), 116; Al-Rasheed, 123.
[845] Steve Coll, *Ghost Wars: The Secret History of the CIA, Afghanistan, and Bin Laden, from the Soviet Invasion to September 10, 2001* (New York: Penguin, 2004), 278-279.
[846] Thomas Hegghammer, "The Rise of Muslim Foreign Fighters: Islam and the Globalization of Jihad," *International Security* 35, no. 3 (Winter 2010/11), 80.
[847] Al-Rasheed, 132.

Such organizations would be useful when the Saudi monarchy faced another challenge, this time from the right. In February 1979, the Iranian revolution offered a powerful lesson to the region's Muslims of the ability of political Islam to overthrow monarchies. Iran's Muslims, united behind a charismatic cleric, had overthrown one of the world's oldest monarchies after its corruption and foreign acquiescence became too unpopular. There were echoes of this in Saudi Arabia, especially after the ill-fated and corrupt rule of Saud bin Abdul Aziz, who had stepped down a decade earlier. This warning to the monarchy was brought home later that year when religious radicals took over the Grand Mosque in Mecca. The Grand Mosque attack was a second shock to Riyadh and its allies. The United States saw it as a continuation of the Iranian threat, coming months after the revolution and seizure of the US embassy. The Iranians believed it was a US-Israeli plot and said so publicly, inciting anti-US riots in several countries throughout the Islamic world.[848] For the Saudis the Grand Mosque seizure posed a twofold challenge. It provoked their Shia, second class-citizens at best, to agitate against their lot, and illegal celebrations of the Shia holiday Ashura broke out later that year.[849] But it also had an appeal to Saudis who felt that the Kingdom under King Fahd had deviated from the strict religious and societal traditions laid down by the state's founder his clergy.

Emboldened by these examples, Saudi Arabia's domestic Islamist movement became increasingly critical of the monarchy.[850] The Kingdom sought to shore up its domestic legitimacy by instituting moral reforms at home and increasing its support for

[848] Dilip Hero, *Cold War in the Islamic World: Saudi Arabia, Iran and the Struggle for Supremacy* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2018), 79.
[849] Ibid.
[850] Vassiliev, 396.

Islamic institutions abroad.[851] Riyadh tightened up its domestic religious strictures immediately. It ended many of the special privileges for the Dhahran Aramco camp of Western oil workers, prohibiting alcohol and the external celebration of Christian holidays. School curriculums were changed, reducing the time spent on topics like math and eliminating European history in exchange for teaching Islamic studies and the history of the Saudi family. Clerics in Saudi Arabia had to receive clearance from the government to preach in mosques, to make sure their message was appropriate.[852] Missionary activity exploded through institutions like the Muslim World League, which seeded Wahhabi preachers and schoolteachers throughout the world. In 1984 Saudi Arabia launched the King Fahd Printing Complex and a new translation of the Koran. This facility would blanket the Islamic world and its outposts with copies of a holy book that was annotated with more militant scriptures, and filled to the brim with polemics against Christians and Jews and modern political issues like Palestine.[853]

Islamic Iran was not only an ideological threat to the Saudi state but a direct geopolitical one as well. This prosed a challenge for the Kingdom. Though its Wahhabism could help with the ideological threat, it would need something more solid militarily to balance Iran in the short term, and the Americans were it. US military personnel were deployed to Saudi Arabia during the 1980's, bringing with them long-range radar, AWACS aircraft, and an air defense system that would systematically link the Gulf States together against Iran.[854] But this was dangerous, and ran the risk of

[851] Alexei Vassiliev, *The History of Saudi Arabia* (London: Saqi, 1998), 396-397; *The Kingdom of Saudi Arabia's Economic and Social Development Aid to the Islamic World* (Riyadh: Ministry of Finance and National Economy, 1991).
[852] Hero, 83.
[853] Kim Ghattas, *Black Wave: Saudi Arabia, Iran, and the Forty-Year Rivalry that Unraveled Culture, Religion, and Collective Memory in the Middle East* (New York: Henry Holt and Company, 2020), 166.
[854] Ghattas, 98.

obviating its increased ideological strictures. The presence of a Western military power on some of Islam's holiest ground would more ammunition to the ideological challenge of Iran (and later militants like Osama bin Laden) but it was necessary. Riyadh also led the effort to form the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) in May 1981, which would provide an institutional framework for the oil emirates to coordinate on softer security issues. Its most important geopolitical compromise, however, was the support of Iraqi President Saddam Hussein's war against Iran. Iraq invaded its neighbor in 1980, initiating an eight-year conflict that drew in most of the GCC. Despite Hussein's legacy as a Soviet client and atheist Baathism, Saudi Arabia lent Hussein billions to continue the war and allowed Iraq to use Saudi air bases. Iran pushed back ideologically, increasing its agitation against Saudi Arabia throughout the decade, and militarily, initiating a four-year war against Saudi and GCC oil tankers in the Gulf.[855]

Saudi Arabia's ideological and geopolitical needs aligned, however, with the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan. The Soviet state was still an ideological concern, a definite geopolitical threat, and – unlike Iran – offered a key release valve for Saudi Arabian militants. The Afghan resistance offered the state an opportunity to demonstrate its fidelity, and the state opened the floodgates. Saudi money flowed to the conflict.[856] By 1984, a surge of Saudi youth was following. Their passage to the combat zone and operational handling were coordinated by a network of charitable and educational foundations created over the previous two decades as part of the expansion of pan-Islamist ideology.[857] An estimated 15,000 Saudis fought in the Afghan war, three times

[855] Commins, 142.
[856] Coll, 25-26, 65-66.
[857] National Commission on Terrorist Attacks upon the United States, Thomas H. Kean and Lee Hamilton, *The 9/11 Commission Report: Final Report of the National Commission on Terrorist Attacks Upon the*

the number from Yemen, the next-highest origin state.[858] The Kingdom winked at the private soldiers, though it lent them little direct support. It built religious schools among the Afghan refugees in Pakistan to spread its brand of Islam, but stayed one step removed, never directly supporting the fighters themselves.[859] Saudi state clerics did not officially call for individual jihad in Afghanistan, nor would they later in Chechnya.[860] But the mujahedin won anyway.

After the victory in Afghanistan, Saudi and other foreign veterans of the conflict – the so-called Afghan Arabs – travelled to other civil wars such as Tajikistan and Yugoslavia. These foreign fighters became a staple of conflicts involving Muslims, with an estimated 10,000-30,000 foreigners migrating to conflict zones to take part in the wars.[861] Saudi society normalized the practice of supporting and fighting for the broader Muslim *umma*, Islamic communities like those in Bosnia under attack by nonbelievers.[862] When these fighters did come back to Saudi Arabia from Afghanistan or elsewhere, they were treated gently, far differently than transnational gunmen would be in other states. Most were usually detained for a short period of time – if at all – and then released.[863]

The benefit Saudi Arabia gained from these wars was threefold. Many were genuine geopolitical victories over unfriendly states by at least nominally less-unfriendly

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United States (Washington, DC: National Commission on Terrorist Attacks upon the United States, 2004), 55-56.

[858] Mark Huband, *Warriors of the Prophet: The Struggle for Islam* (Boulder: Westview, 1998), 2.

[859] Oliver Roy, *Islam and Resistance in Afghanistan*, 2nd ed. (New York: University of Cambridge Press, 1990), 218.

[860] Hegghammer (2010/11), 78.

[861] Hegghammer (2010/11), 53; Miriam Abou Zahab and Oliver Roy, trans. John King *Islamist Networks: The Afghan-Pakistan Connection* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2004), 47-80.

[862] Oliver Roy, *Globalised Islam: the search for a new ummah* (London: Hurst, 2004), 91-94; Hegghammer (2008), 705.

[863] Thomas Hegghammer, "Jihad, Yes, But Not Revolution: Explaining the Extraversion of Islamist Violence in Saudi Arabia," *British Journal of Middle Eastern Studies* 36, no. 3 (December 2009): 412-413.

actors. In addition, they helped with domestic legitimacy among Saudi Arabia's own radicals. The state could point to its support for jihad and spreading Salafism abroad as marks of piety, and in the worst case distract the radicals with foreign jihads rather than the monarchy's own failings. This was particularly helpful since Iran, in places like Pakistan and Afghanistan, had been supporting and building ties with Shia communities, both to support militants but also simply to promote its Shia brand of Islam, antithetical to Wahhabis. It was an imperfect release valve, of course, since some of this radicalism would eventually target the Saud regime nonetheless.[864] Lastly, this support also earned the Saudi government domestic legitimacy among non-radicals concerned about Muslim communities abroad.

Chechnya was one such community. Nationalism ran deep in Chechnya: its people were famously ungovernable, even for the Caucasus. Their first rebellions against Russian domination were launched in 1825 and 1829 by a local Sufi leader, but their most successful revolt came under the insurgent Imam Shamil.[865] Shamil's Caucasian Emirate, a combined religious-political state, collapsed shortly after his capture in 1859, and Russia absorbed the rest of the North Caucasus several years later. The Chechens rebelled again during the Bolshevik revolution; they cooperated with communist insurgents against Czarist authority in the Caucasus, and then unsuccessfully demanded independence from Russia's new leaders when the Bolsheviks took power.[866] Concerned about their loyalty during the Second World War, Joseph Stalin deported the entire

[864] Fawaz Gerges, *The Far Enemy: Why Jihad Went Global* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 30.
[865] Carlotta Gall and Thomas de Waal, *Chechnya: Calamity in the Caucasus* (New York: New York University Press, 1998), 42-49.
[866] Elena Pokalova, *Chechnya's Terrorist Network: The Evolution of Terrorism in Russia's North Caucasus* (Santa Barbara: Praeger, 2015), 12.

Chechen population to Kazakhstan in 1944. It took a decade for them to return. When the USSR began to totter, a Soviet Air Force general named Dzhokhar Dudayev returned to Chechnya to declare independence in 1991.

Source: Oliker, 11

Chechnya's revolutionary military and political leadership had a dualistic character. Dzhokhar Dudayev and Aslan Maskhadov, the republic's first leaders, were both reasonably secular ex-senior Soviet military officers and many of their fighters had experience in the Soviet army. At the same time, there existed an Islamist element of the Chechen rebel forces which gained power steadily through the decade: not through the political process, such as it was, but through strength on the ground. The northern Caucasus region, like other lands in the former Soviet Union's south, experienced a

religious revival after the collapse of communism in 1991, particularly a rise in Salafism.[867] As Afghan Arabs drifted into Chechnya, they were integral in spreading this version of Islam and tying it economically and politically to local Chechen communities. These foreigners were almost wholly from the Middle East and usually from Saudi Arabia's Wahhabi community.[868] For example, the first networks of militant Salafist communities – *jamaats* – were established by the Afghan Arab Shaikh Fathi Mohammed Habib in the Chechen cities of Urus-Martan, Vedeno, and Gudermes, the republic's second-largest.[869] As the decade went on dozens of these *jamaats* sprang up in Chechnya. The camps and growing network of *jamaats* created self-reinforcing links with each other. During times of crisis, leaders and fighters from Dagestan's Salafist *jamaats* would reinforce Chechen radicals and vice versa, increasing both groups' operational capabilities to the point where they could overwhelm local authorities. Politically,  supported pan-Islamic organizations in the Caucasus and would eventually create their own, imperiling both Chechen and Russian secular authority.[870]

But at the time of independence in 1991, radical groups were also a minority. Up until the end of the first war, most Chechen leaders opposed Salafism. It was a creed of foreigners; the Islam that was native to Chechnya was Sufism, a tradition that placed great emphasis on the personal, mystical experience of God. Sufi practices like the veneration of holy men were anathema to the puritanical traditions of Salafism, and they

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[867] Alexey Malashenko, *Islamic Challenges to Russia, From the Caucasus to the Volga and the Urals,* in *Putin's Russia: How it Rose, How it is Maintained, and How it Might End*, ed. Leon Aron (Washington, DC: American Enterprise Institute, 2015), 143; Roland Dannreuther, "Islamic Radicalization in Chechnya: an assessment," *Royal Institute of International Affairs* 86, no. 1 (Jan. 2010): 112.
[868] Hegghammer (2008), 707-713.
[869] Sagramosa, 697; Elena Pokalova, *Chechnya's Terrorist Network: The Evolution of Terrorism in Russia's North Caucasus* (Santa Barbara: Praeger, 2015), 88.
[870] Akhmadov and Lanskoy, 95.

had deep roots in local tradition.[871] Even later radicals like Shamil Basayev started out as Sufis during the first war. However, the Salafists had something the Sufis did not: resources. Salafist mosques and representatives often had a surplus of cash to distribute to help attract followers and converts, a product of their external support.[872] Over time, this would help their movement overwhelm competing ideologies and dominate the new republic.

II. Conflict

Saudi Arabia and the first Chechen war, 1991-1996

Saudi Arabia, the source of much of this support and many of these foreign radicals, was vocally supportive of the Chechens' burgeoning independence movement.[873] Safeguarding the freedom of the Chechen state was an essentially defensive goal the Kingdom, the secular Chechens, and the slowly increasing number of radicals shared. Russia had long been an opponent of Saudi Arabia, especially during the Cold War. The Soviets' revolutionary atheism and the pretend atheism of their clients had been a direct threat to the monarchies of the Gulf. Earlier Saudi monarchs like Faisal bin Abdul Aziz had despised the USSR, communism, and especially the restrictions the Soviet state put on its Muslims.[874] Geopolitically it also was the Soviet clients and fellow travellers that had provided the main threat to Saudi Arabia, at least until Iran's revolution. In the 1980's these tensions reached a peak; in addition to backing the

[871] Ware and Kisriev, 100.
[872] Tishkov, 174.
[873] Zbigniew Brzezinski and Paige Sullivan, eds., *Russia and the Commonwealth of Independent States: Documents, Data, and Analysis* (Armonk: M.E. Sharpe, 1997), 564.
[874] Hero, 34.

Afghan resistance, Saudi Arabia had also been critical in depressing oil prices expanding production, leading to severe budget shortfalls at a time when Gorbachev's Soviet Union needed revenue the most. In the last years of the Union the relationship had partially thawed. The end of the Soviet war in Afghanistan, the unification of Yemen, and the humbling of Iraq all reduced Russia's threat to Saudi Arabia and relations between the two improved.[875] The Saudis and other Gulf States offered Russia a $2 billion loan in 1990 to help stabilize its economy, and Moscow had high hopes for future Saudi investment and bilateral trade.[876] But those ambitions collapsed under new geopolitical strains in 1994. The rise of the Taliban in Afghanistan alarmed the Russians, as did the increasingly prominent role of Saudi institutions vying for the loyalty of Russia's Muslims, especially in the restive south. Saudi Arabia's perceived support for the Chechen independence and the separatists exacerbated these strains.

This went both ways. In Riyadh, Saudi anger over the Chechen war was itself was worsened by Russia's involvement in nuclear proliferation and disregard for OPEC policy.[877] The Kingdom was increasingly preoccupied with Russia even as its immediate security concerns with Iran were easing. This was largely a result of Iran's desire to reduce its isolation, spur economic growth, and improve living standards, but it found a receptive audience in Saudi Crown Prince Abdullah bin Abdul Aziz.[878] Saudi officials met with Iranian President Hashemi Rafsanjani at the UN in 1990 to discuss a détente and then in March 1991 both countries officially restored diplomatic ties. The Saudis

[875] Mark Katz, "Saudi Arabia and Russia," in *Saudi Arabian Foreign Policy: Conflict and Cooperation*, ed. Neil Patrick (New York: I.B. Taurus, 2016), 346.
[876] Nikolas Gvosdev and Christopher Marsh, "Russian Foreign Policy: Interests, Vectors, and Sectors (London: Sage Publications, 2014), 308; also Katz, 346.
[877] Gvosdev and Marsh, 309; Katz, 346.
[878] Hero, 147.

subsequently lifted their restrictions on Iranians performing the hajj.[879] King Fahd's stroke in November 1995, which all but incapacitated him, allowed Abdullah to continue this warming, including regular head of state consultation. Even after the Hezbollah-linked bombing of the Khobar Towers complex in Saudi Arabia, the Saudis hesitated to jeopardize the opening with Iran and declined to participate fully in the investigation.[880] President Mohammed Khatami, Rafsanjani's successor, continued this warming and Saudi Arabia's ties with Iran improved throughout the decade, capped off by an historic visit of Khatami to Riyadh. Abdullah further encouraged his GCC allies to warm ties with the Islamic Republic, and some did.[881]

Saudi goals towards the burgeoning Chechen state were threefold. On principle, Riyadh supported Chechen independence, and was one of the few states to recognize Chechnya. Secondly, it aimed to weaken Russia, its traditional rival. The separatists shared these two goals, though there was a contingent like Maskhadov that sought to retain functional relations with their neighbor since it dominated Chechnya's economy before and after independence. For most of the separatists, however, Russia was still the primary enemy: Russia and perhaps secondarily some of the secularists of the so-called Chechen Republic of Ichkeria.

But Saudi Arabia also sought to Islamize the new state: that is, to introduce conservative Islamic social and political norms. The function of Saudi institutions in spreading Salafism overseas and to Chechnya in particular suggested that this was of value to Riyadh. Certainly, Saudi Arabia's domestic ideology was far more sharia-

[879] Ghattas, 209-210.
[880] Ghattas, 210.
[881] Hero, 162.

adherent than was the post-Soviet republic of Chechnya's. This Islamicization also included the promotion of pan-Islamic goals, the creation of a network of Islamic states knit together by an Islamic community. In particular, these were shared by the foreign militants arriving in Chechnya whose experiences in transnational conflicts reflected their belief in a broader Islamic community.

Operationalizing this third goal would ultimately incur significant consequences for the Salafists. It was the cross-border actions by large groups of armed men – Wahhabis in Chechnya supporting Wahhabis in Dagestan, and vice versa – that turned intrastate wars into interstate wars and incurred dispositive balancing. These operations altered the high-deniability Saudi model of proxy warfare into something like separatist-sponsored conventional warfare and incurred much more of a reaction from the target. However, when the Salafists chose to operate in this fashion, there was little Riyadh could do. The proxies Saudi Arabia supported had a high degree of operational capability on the battlefield, but also a very high degree of agency. With independent sources of support, Saudi proxies had no reason to heed the Saudi state. Riyadh had only minimal ability to influence the Islamists' actions tactically or operationally, and even strategically its control was limited. All it could do was increase or decrease the flow of support – money, primarily – going into its vast network of private Islamic institutions, and perhaps filter down some guidance to its networks of state and semi-state clerics. Unlike Pakistan's relationship with the Haqqani network, only rarely would any of the Afghan Arabs work on behalf of their sponsor to change the aims of other militants to benefit the state. This was a key weakness for the Kingdom when its proxies sought to operationalize pan-Islamic goals. Taken to an extreme, the Salafists' pursuit of this goal

could incite intense balancing by Russia and ultimately the West, enough to harm all other goals the Salafists and their sponsors pursued. The clearest examples of this were the later combat events at Buynksk, Gudermes, and decisively at Karamakhi.

The Chechen war began when the Russian army launched a major assault on Grozny in December 1994, finally seizing the city four months later after heavy losses. Amidst widespread tactical and operational failures, Russia sustained a high level of casualties as it gradually expanded its control throughout the lowland areas of Chechnya and pushed up against the mountains. By mid-1995, the Chechen war was already a political millstone for Yeltsin; after only seven months of operations, 80 percent of Russians favored an end to hostilities.[882] Though Grozny had mostly been secured by federal forces, the rural areas and highlands were still lawless. Russian troops came under frequent guerrilla attacks, including a series of devastating ambushes by an Afghan Arab known as Ibn Khattab. Khattab's attack on a Russian armored column in the mountainous village of Shatoy, south of Grozny, left over a hundred dead and destroyed dozens of vehicles, earning him considerable fame.[883] Throughout the rebel area, unmotivated and badly trained Russian troops were unable to pin down an elusive enemy. Again and again, periods of apparent stability were broken by semi-independent operations including terrorist attacks that produced almost immediate Russian political concessions.

[882] Graham Allison and Matthew Lantz, "Assessing Russia's Democratic Presidential Election," *Belfer Center for Science and International Affairs* (1996), http://www.belfercenter.org/publication/assessing-russias-democratic-presidential-election (accessed March 4, 2017); Will Englund, "78% favor end to Chechen war, Russia poll says," *The Baltimore Sun* (January 20, 1995), http://articles.baltimoresun.com-/1995-01-20/news/1995020044_1_war-in-chechnya-kovalyov-chechen-war (accessed February 28, 2017).
[883] Ware and Kisriev, 104.

The end of the first war was born of one such attack in mid-1995. On June 4, Russian troops captured Vedeno in the southern mountains, a major rebel military headquarters where insurgent leader Shamil Basayev was reported to be hiding. Basayev was gone. He and two hundred armed men had slipped away to Budennovsk, a town in the neighboring province of Stavropol Krai where Russia's main airbase for its Chechen campaign was located.[884] The militants seized approximately 1,500 hostages and barricaded themselves into a hospital, demanding immediate negotiations to end the war. After six hostages had been executed on the fourth day of the siege, Russian troops attempted to storm the hospital in a spectacularly uncoordinated effort. Special operations forces assaulted the Chechens' position as armored vehicles fired blindly into the hospital, killing hundreds. After multiple assaults were repelled, Prime Minister Victor Chernomyrdin called a halt. He offered a temporary ceasefire, negotiations to end the conflict, and safe passage for the militants back to Chechnya.[885] Basayev had won.

The peace talks began in Grozny on June 19, 1995. They successfully established a ceasefire that came into effect on June 20, but negotiations on other points stretched out for weeks. Eventually, on July 31, both sides agreed on a strategy for disengagement. Russian forces would depart, leaving only two brigades behind, and the Chechens would disarm most of their fighters and try to bring the Budennovsk perpetrators to justice.[886] Amidst grumbling from their commanders that the terms were too generous to Russia, Dudayev and Maskhadov supported the outcome.[887] Under the agreement, new Chechen

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[884] Schaefer, 132.
[885] Sebastian Smith, *Allah's Mountains: The Battle for Chechnya, New ed.* (New York: Tauris Parke, 2006), 201-202.
[886] Ian Jeffries, *Economies in Transition* (Routledge: New York, 1996), 97.
[887] "Dudayev Dismisses Top Negotiator," *Monitor* 1, issue 65 (August 2, 1995), https://jamestown.org/program/dudayev-dismisses-top-negotiator/ (accessed February 21, 2017).

elections were scheduled for later in the year after Russian troops withdrew. However, Moscow broke the ceasefire in October after a failed assassination attempt against the commander of its forces in Chechnya. It appointed the reliable ex-Communist official Doku Zavgayev as Chechen head of state in October and stood him in presidential elections two months later. Zavgayev had little Chechen support, but since federal troops had not yet withdrawn, the 75,000 Russian soldiers could vote and did, ensuring his victory.[888]

Again, however, Russian progress in Chechnya was disrupted by semi-independent guerrilla raids. On January 9, 1996, militants under the command of Salman Raduyev crossed into neighboring Dagestan and attacked the Russian military airfield at Kizlyar, two miles over the border. Initially, the raid failed. Raduyev's force destroyed several helicopters and killed 33 people, but they were repelled by Russian troops and forced to fall back towards Chechnya.[889] Under heavy attack, the fighters once again changed course and reentered the town, taking an estimated two thousand people prisoner and barricading themselves in a hospital. There, surrounded by hostages, they negotiated safe passage back to Chechnya. As they neared the border, however, Russian forces welshed on the deal and attacked Raduyev's convoy which scattered into the town of Pervomayskoye. Shortly thereafter, Moscow launched a hastily planned attack on the town, which collapsed. The siege was broken when another Chechen column crossed the

[888] "Vote of Russian Soldiers Big Factor in Chechnya Election," *Monitor* 1, issue 147 (December 5, 1995), https://jamestown.org/program/votes-of-russian-soldiers-big-factor-in-chechnya-election/ (accessed March 3, 2017).
[889] Schaefer, 136.

border and attacked Russian forces in the rear, thus allowing Raduyev's militants to withdraw.[890]

Like Budennovsk, the Kizlyar raid drew unwelcome attention to the conflict in Russia and abroad. Facing federal elections that summer, Yeltsin tried to demonstrate that the war was nearing an end. On March 31, 1996, he signed a measure initiating Chechen parliamentary elections to bolster the Zavgayev government and announced further troop withdrawals.[891] In another coup, Russian forces killed Dudayev with a missile strike on April 21 while he was talking on a satellite phone. Dudayev was succeeded by his vice president Zelimkhan Yandarbayev, a poet and children's book author who was more religious and ideological than Dudayev but weaker politically. A month after Dudayev was killed, Russian forces announced their capture of the last rebel-held village after a major battle in late May. These measures worked: Yeltsin was reelected with a 35 percent plurality of the vote.

Holding a strong hand, Yeltsin restarted reconciliation talks for the remaining rebel holdouts with Yandarbayev. Peace negotiations between Russian and Chechen delegations began on June 4 in Ingushetia but were quickly followed by a wave of terrorism. On June 11, there was an explosion on the Moscow subway, and on June 28 a bus traveling to the North Ossetian capital of Vladikavkaz was bombed. Two more bombings followed in Moscow in early July.[892] The rebels combined these asymmetric attacks with a lightning strike on the Chechen capital. Shortly before Yeltsin began his

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[890] Smith, 213-214.
[891] Lee Hockstader, "Yeltsin Orders Truce in Chechnya," *The Washington Post* (April 1, 1996), https://www.washingtonpost.com/archive/politics/1996/04/01/yeltsin-orders-truce-in-chechnya/f8b3ac90-1ce0-4bbb-948b-9b67cf08d266/?utm_term=.0f93e5ad85f6 (accessed March 10, 2017).
[892] "Chechen Leaders Deny Responsibility for Moscow Bomb Blasts," *Monitor* 2, no. 137 (July 15, 1996); http://reliefweb.int/report/russian-federation/15-july-1996-monitor-vol-ii-no-137 (accessed February 28, 2017); Pokalova, 60.

second term in August, following a quiet July, an estimated 1,500 Chechen militants led by Basayev and well-known commander Ruslan Gelayev advanced into the capital, surrounding and isolating Russian troop emplacements and fortifying the three key roads into the city.[893] When Russian relief forces attempted to reach their compatriots, they suffered heavy losses and were repulsed.

On August 19, local Russian commanders laid down an ultimatum to the rebels: leave Grozny within 48 hours or the military would level the city. When word of this reached Moscow, Yeltsin blinked. He sent his Secretary of the Security Council Alexander Lebed to Chechnya to disavow the ultimatum and instead establish an immediate ceasefire on August 20. After several days of negotiation between Lebed and Maskhadov, they signed the Khasavyurt Accord, which marked the effective end of the war. It codified the ceasefire in place, established joint control of certain areas, and committed Russia to remove its troops from Chechnya by December 31, 1996. At a cost of 25,000 Russian and 80,000 Chechen casualties, the first war had – somewhat improbably – resulted in a rebel victory.[894]

Saturation, 1997-2000

After the end of the first Russian war, Salafists in Chechnya began to aggressively expand their influence, aided by Saudi institutions, Saudi money, and Saudi militants. They were able to grow powerful enough to subvert the Chechen state and carve out autonomous territory in Dagestan, while facing little effective internal or external

[893] LtCol Timothy Jackson, "David Slays Goliath: A Chechen Perspective on the War in Chechnya (1994-1996)," *Small Wars Journal* (2000), 20-21, smallwarsjournal.com/documents/davidgoliath.pdf (accessed March 15, 2017).
[894] Schaefer, 143.

balancing. This changed when large groups of them transgressed [redacted] lines, most clearly in August 1999.

In this model of proxy relationship, the lawlessness of the proxies did have benefits in delaying additional external balancing against both the Salafists and their sponsor. The West had been relatively friendly towards Chechnya in the first war, despite numerous major terrorist attacks and the growing role of foreign Salafists. US President Bill Clinton had reacted with caution after hostilities broke out in December 1994, wary about upsetting his relationship with Yeltsin. At the podium the day after Russian troops went in, White House spokesman Mike McCurry stressed that the issue was "an internal affair of the government of Russia for all Russians." He said the US had only asked the Russians if "bloodshed can be minimized, that the use of force can be minimized, and that they might be successful…in negotiating an end to this conflict." A few months later, that equivocation had sharpened. Deputy Secretary of State Strobe Talbott called Russia's actions an "outrage" in February and his boss Warren Christopher called Russia's actions "foolhardy" in March.[896] The Chechen war led President Clinton to decline attendance at Russia's commemoration of the 50th anniversary of the victory over Germany in May, joining a similar boycott by Germany, the United Kingdom, and France.

This friendliness was sustained through the entry of foreign fighters into the conflict and the increasing use of terrorism by the rebels. The Saudi radical, Ibn al-

[896] U.S. Department of State, "U.S. Interests and Russian Reform" (March 6, 1995), https://heinonline.org/HOL/LandingPage?handle=hein.journals/dsptch14&div=108&id=&page= (accessed May 2, 2020); Steven Greenhouse, "Christopher Says Russia May Pay High Price for Chechen War," *The New York Times* (March 23, 1995), https://www.nytimes.com/1995/03/23/world/christopher-says-russia-may-pay-high-price-for-chechen-war.html (accessed May 1, 2020).

Khattab, for instance, was never mentioned by name nor criticized for any of his operations, including his leadership of major ambushes in October 1995 and Shatoy in 1996, the latter of which came five days before Clinton met Yeltsin in Moscow. This was somewhat abnormal for the White House: national security officials would sometimes mention specifically other combat incidents that occurred, usually less major.[897] Nor did the Administration make mention during the conflict – ever – of the training camps for militants that were being established, or indeed foreign fighters that were entering the republic. When the issue of terrorism did come up, US officials would usually contextualize Chechen blame away. The US did not even criticize Basayev's hostage-taking operation at Budenovsk, with the White House limiting itself to a milquetoast comment endorsing Russian Prime Minister Chernomyrdin's negotiations.[898] That stance was barely dented by Raduyev's actions in January 1996 in Dagestan at Kizlyar and Pervamoskoye. Clinton personally condemned the taking of hostages, which the White House said "simply had no justification," before the US returned to the familiar theme that it was "troubled and concerned by the use of force" to resolve the incident.[899] This was consistent with the broader US slowness to wake up to the challenges of Sunni radicalism during this period and particularly the murky involvement of Saudi Arabia. For example, there was nothing but praise for the Saudi government after the November 13, 1995 attacks by Saudi radicals against US personnel at a Saudi National Guard training center. Even months later, the US was citing Saudi Arabia as a "like-minded

[897] For example, The White House, "Remarks by Anthony Lake to the U.S.-Russia Business Council" (April 1, 1996), https://clintonwhitehouse4.archives.gov/WH/EOP/NSC/html/speeches/tlrussia.html (accessed May 2, 2020).
[898] Lee Hockstader, "Chechen Gunmen Head Home: Deal Lets Rebels Quit Russian City with Volunteers," *The Washington Post* (June 20, 1995), D30.
[899] The White House, "Press Briefing By Mike McCurry" (January 16, 1996), https://clintonwhitehouse6.-archives.gov/1996/01/1996-01-16-mccurry-briefing.html (accessed May 3, 2020).

state" in dealing with this problem and avoiding questions about Saudi involvement in radicalism.[900]

The curious thing was that the Russians did not focus on foreign interference in its war either, despite Salafist leadership of numerous devastating ambushes during the first war and the establishment of militant training camps. Broadly, pan-Islamic activity in territory of the former USSR did concern Russia, and especially on the territory of the Russian Federation. For example, Yeltsin was deeply alarmed when in 1992 the Tajik Islamic Renaissance Party held a conference in Russia attended by Chechens and other Muslims from the former Soviet Union to discuss creating a unified Islamic movement in southern Russia.[901] After Tajikstan's president Rakhman Nabiyev was forced from power in September 1992, Russia condemned "outside interference" in its Islamic south.[902] But during the first Chechen war, these themes were rarely touched on. Instead, effort was made to downplay the crisis publicly, including the role of outside forces. Chernomyrdin blamed the start of the war on Shamil Basayev's involvement in the assassination of a Russian general. At the May 9 Victory Day celebration that the West had boycotted, Yeltsin's hardline Defense Minister Pavel Grachev did not mention Chechnya or more broadly outside forces involved in Chechnya.[903] Of course, this was partly political: Yeltsin had been politically wounded by the war and had no desire to portray it as escalating. But this position continued beyond Yeltsin's political

[900] The White House, "Press Briefing by Mike McCurry" (June 25, 1996), https://clintonwhitehouse6.-archives.gov/1996/06/1996-06-25-mccurry-press-briefing-on-bombing-in-saudi-arabia.html (accessed May 4, 2020).
[901] Karen Dawisha and Bruce Parrott, *Russia and the New States of Eurasia* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1994), 99.
[902] Dawisha and Parrott, 101.
[903] Richard Balmforth, "Russia flaunts military might at VE celebrations," *Reuters* (May 9, 1995), https://global-factiva-com.ezproxy.lib.utexas.edu/ha/default.aspx#./!?&_suid=15912163140140565176-2824942825 (accessed April 22, 2020).

vulnerability, even after serious atrocities. For example, during a meeting of Yeltsin and Clinton on April 21, 1996, Yeltsin startled the audience when he claimed, "military actions in the Chechnya region are not going on." Lingering hostilities were blamed on "some bands" that were "still running around...making life difficult for a lot of people." When the issue of outsiders did come up, it was in the context of intermediaries to Dudayev and the secular leadership – the King of Morocco, the President of Tatarstan. Nor did Yeltsin have qualms with Chechnya internally: in the same appearance, he stressed that the only question the two states disagreed on was whether Chechnya was part of Russia.[904]

Acknowledged or not, the outside influence was definitely there. The growth of Salafist influence in Chechnya was visible in people and money, particularly Saudis and their money. Foreign fighters were pouring into Chechnya, home of the 'next great Afghan victory', and nearly half of these travelled through networks run by Saudi Arabia's established charitable and educational institutions. This included several hundred Arabs, of which Saudis were the most numerous, comprising 59 percent of the foreigners, along with 14 percent Yemenis, 10 percent Egyptians, and 10 percent Kuwaitis.[905] The most famous of these Arabs was Ibn al-Khattab, the bête-noir of Russian forces for seven years. He was a Saudi, born to the name Saleh Abdullah al-Suwailem who had fought the Soviets in Afghanistan at the age of seventeen and perhaps met Osama bin Laden.[906] Khattab traveled on to fight in the Tajik civil war in the mid-

[904] The White House, "Press Conference by President Clinton and President Yeltsin" (April 21, 1996), https://clintonwhitehouse6.archives.gov/1996/04/1996-04-21-press-conference-with-clinton-yeltsin-moscow.html (accessed May 5, 2020).
[905] Al-Shishani, 3; Thomas Hegghammer, *Jihad in Saudi Arabia: Violence and Pan-Islamism since 1979* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 56.
[906] "Obituary: Chechen Rebel Khattab," *BBC* (April 26, 2002), http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/europe/1952053-.stm (accessed December 3, 2016).

1990's and came to Chechnya in 1995 at the invitation of a fellow Afghan veteran.[907] Following the practice that members of al-Qaeda would employ later in the tribal areas of Pakistan, he married a local woman from the town of Karamakhi in neighboring Dagestan.[908] Khattab was close friends with Chechen rebel leader Shamil Basayev and a critical influence in radicalizing Basayev's worldview.[909] Another prominent Saudi arrival during the war was Abu al-Walid al-Ghamdi, who succeeded Khattab as the commander of the Chechens' best military unit, the International Islamic Peacekeeping Brigade (IIPB). He had fought in Bosnia and Tajikistan, before joining Khattab on the front line during the first war.[910]

Khattab founded the first major foreign-run training camp in Chechnya during the war. It was called Kavkaz ("Caucasus" in Russian) and located in Serzhen-Yurt, a small town about 35 kilometers southeast of Grozny. Khattab and about 100 foreign instructors focused on teaching the sabotage and guerilla tactics they had learned in Afghanistan as well as providing Salafist religious instruction.[911] Eventually, his operation grew to a chain of four compounds all around Serzhen-Yurt, with a well-known 45-day curriculum that served as a model for others.[912]

[907] Robert Bruce Ware and Enver Kisriev, *Dagestan: Russian Hegemony and Islamic Resistance in the North Caucasus* (Armonk: M.E. Sharpe, 2010), 103-104; Hegghammer (2010), 55.
[908] Ware and Kisriev, 104.
[909] Akhmadov and Lanskoy, 204.
[910] M.B. Nokhcho and Glen Howard, "Chechnya's Abu Walid and The Saudi Dilemma," *Terrorism Monitor* 2, issue 1 (May 5, 2005), https://jamestown.org/program/chechnyas-abu-walid-and-the-saudi-dilemma/ (accessed December 12, 2016).
[911] Brian Glyn Williams, "Allah's foot soldiers: an assessment of the role of foreign fighters and Al-Qa'ida in the Chechen insurgency," in *Ethno-Nationalism, Islam, and the State in the Caucasus: Post-Soviet Disorder*, ed. Moshe Gammer (New York: Routledge, 2008), 164; Oleg Oliker, *Russia's Chechen Wars, 1994-2000* (Santa Monica: Rand, 2001), 39-40.
[912] Brian Glyn Williams, *Inferno in Chechnya: The Russian-Chechen Wars, the Al Qaeda Myth, and the Boston Marathon Bombings* (Hanover: University Press of New England, 2015), 120.

Camps like Khattab's flourished after fighting concluded in 1996. They were located in Chechnya, Dagestan, and in the Pankisi Gorge along the border with Georgia.[913] Wahhabi recruiters often offered Chechen youths 100 to 200 rubles a month to attend.[914] The camps were promoted by a variety of organizations like the Islamic Institute in Grozny (which itself received funding from Saudi Arabia) and the Saudi Ibrahim ben Abd al-Aziz al-Ibrahim Foundation, and by the beginning of the second war had trained an estimated 1,600-2,500 recruits.[915] At their apogee, these had different functions: the Yakub camp instructed recruits how to use heavy weapons, the Davlat camp taught psychological warfare, and the Abubakar camp taught terrorism.[916] Several of these facilities allegedly had direct ties to Afghanistan, Saudi Arabia, and other Islamic countries. The Sayed Ibn Abu Vakas camp, for example, received recruits and money from Pakistani militant groups.[917] Khattab's camps and others like them were a feature of the type of private sector support received from places like Saudi Arabia, and were mimicked elsewhere like in Afghanistan. They were pockets of political autonomy and an enabler of the more radical opposition, by sustaining and increasing their power base.

Like the recruitment and training of militants, Saudi financing for the Chechens came mostly from private sources. These sources were a function, at least in part, of the pan-Islamic ideology and jihadist currents that had been normalized in Saudi society.

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[913] Oliker, 39-40; Pokalova, 87.
[914] Emma Gilligan, *Terror in Chechnya: Russia and the Tragedy of Civilians in War* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2009), 29.
[915] Mairbek Vatchagaev, "The Kremlin's War on Islamic Education in the North Caucasus," *North Caucasus Weekly* 7, issue 34. (September 8, 2006), https://jamestown.org/program/the-kremlins-war-on-islamic-education-in-the-north-caucasus-2/ (accessed February 18, 2017); Vladimir Bobrovnikov, "Al-Azhar and Sharia Courts in Twentieth Century Caucasus," *Middle Eastern Studies* 37, 4 (March 2001): 13; Pokalova, 87.
[916] Oliker, 40.
[917] Oliker, 40.

Funding for humanitarian efforts bled over into more overtly military ones, all seen broadly within Saudi society as charity, part of a community effort to support Islam.[918] There was certainly some limited direct support: for example, the Saudi monarch King Fahd gave $5 million for Chechen Muslims through the Joint Saudi Committee for the Relief of Kosovo and Chechnya, and he flew hundreds of Chechens to Mecca for the hajj. Saudi television also conducted fundraising efforts on behalf of the Chechens, like the Chechnya Relief Campaign.[919] But the bulk of the financing was private. The U.S. government estimated that during the period of independence, private Islamist groups broadly donated $100 million to the Chechen cause.[920] This included both older institutions that supported the Afghan jihad and those that were created after, some specifically for Chechnya. The al-Haramayn Islamist Foundation, for example, was founded to support the mujahedin in Afghanistan, but during the Chechen war funded Khattab and Basayev through its branch office in Azerbaijan. Khattab used Saudi money to open religious schools in Chechnya and paid families to send their children as students.[921] Saudi organizations like Igatha and al-Haramayn were also instrumental in funding the Chechen fighters, as well as legitimate humanitarian projects.[922] These and other active charities like the Benevolence International Foundation and the Islamic Salvation Organization all had strong Wahhabi or Salafist influences.[923]

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[918] Hegghammer (Winter 2006), 49.
[919] "Massive Response to Saudi TV's Chechnya Relief Campaign," *Islamic Voice* 14-01, no. 157 (January 2000), http://www.islamicvoice.com/january.2000/report.htm#MAS (accessed December 22, 2016).
[920] Matthew Janeczko, "'Faced with death, even a mouse bites': Social and religious motivations behind terrorism in Chechnya," *Small Wars & Insurgencies* 25, issue 2 (June 19, 2014): 441-442; Ariel Cohen, "Russia and Religious Terrorism: Shifting Dangers," *Eurasianet.org* (January 3, 2003), http://www.eurasianet.org/departments-/insight/articles/eav010703.shtml (accessed March 2, 2017).
[921] Al-Ubaydi, 23.
[922] Pokalova, 89.
[923] Sagramoso, 694.

Afghan Arabs like Sheikh Fathi Mohammed Habib helped connect the Chechen rebels to these private financial communities and institutions in the Gulf.[925] The Benevolence International Foundation, based in Chicago, was one of Fathi's conduits for funneling charity money to Chechnya, and Fathi also maintained safe houses for travelling jihadis in places like Azerbaijan.[926] Another key financial link for the Chechens was Ahmed Nasser Eid Abdullah al-Fajri al-Azimi, known as al-Kuwaiti, who had come to Chechnya in the late 1990's after having attended al-Qaeda-run training camps in Afghanistan. A third important fundraiser was the Saudi-born Abu Omar al-Saif, who had fought against the Soviets in Afghanistan before travelling to the North Caucasus in 1996 to become the head of the court system under Chechnya's interim president Zelimkhan Yandarbayev.[927] The robust funding streams these sources represented helped support the camps and communities of local radicals who ultimately operationalized Salafist tenets in Chechnya.[928]

The Salafists' first target, the republic's political leadership, emerged from the first war in a position of strength. The secular former Soviet military officer Aslan Maskhadov was appointed prime minister of the Chechen Republic of Ichkeria on October 17, 1996, and elected president in January of the next year with over sixty percent of the vote. It was not close: Shamil Basayev came in second with 23.5 percent and Yandarbayev an even more distant third. Several other well-known candidates like the Salafist Movladi Udugov polled only a fraction of support. Maskhadov quickly

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[925] Tumelty, "The Rise and Fall of Foreign Fighters in Chechnya."
[926] Pokalova, 89; Aukai Collins, *My Jihad: The True Story of an American Mujahid's Amazing Journey* (Guilford: Lyons Press, 2002), 122-123.
[927] Murad Batal al-Shishani, "Abu Omar Al-Saif: His Life and After His Death," *North Caucasus Weekly* 7, issue 5 (January 19, 2006), https://jamestown.org/program/abu-omar-al-saif-his-life-and-after-his-death/ (accessed December 20, 2016).
[928] Sagramoso, 697.

began amalgamating some of the most high-profile commanders and rivals into the structures and confines of the secular civilian government. The power ministries like Defense and Internal Affairs were given to his allies. The two most significant commanders Basayev and Gelayev were consolidated with high-level but non-military posts. Basayev was appointed deputy prime minister and Gelayev was made the Minister of Construction, a portfolio rife with opportunities for skim. Salafist commander Arbi Barayev's brother Shirvani was put at the head of the State Committee for Energy Resources, another significant role given Chechnya's oil deposits and extensive prewar refining operation.[929] Movladi Udugov was made the Minister of Information. Udugov was a radical: besides Khattab, probably the commander most identified with Salafist Islam. He had served as a press secretary under Dudayev and later rose to deputy prime minister in Yandarbayev's cabinet.[930]

Maskhadov followed these moves with attempts to consolidate the security forces under his control. On March 13, 1997, he founded the National Guard as a centrally controlled armed force consisting of about 2,000 members. He ordered the integration of wartime guerrilla formations like Barayev's Special Purpose Islamic Regiment (IPON) into the National Guard and handed out commissions to prominent commanders.[931] Maskhadov eliminated the wartime autonomy of the various guerrilla "fronts," placing all forces under Grozny's command and control.[932] His administration also attempted to

[929] Williams (2015), 119.
[930] "Chechen President Puts His Cabinet Together," *Monitor* 3, issue 33 (February 17, 1997), https://jamestown.org/program/chechen-president-puts-his-cabinet-together/ (accessed November 28, 2017).
[931] Ekaterina Sokirianskaya, "State and violence in Chechnya (1997-1999)," in *Chechnya at War and Beyond*. ed. Anne Le Huerou, Aude Merlin, Amandine Regamey, Elisabeth Sieca-Kozlowski (New York: Routledge, 2014), 103.
[932] Sokirianskaya, 103.

reduce the number of privately held weapons in the republic through measures like buyback programs and gun control laws. However, these measures stalled. His nascent government could not actually implement gun control and other security measures, particularly in places like Khattab's camps and other Salafist enclaves.[933] The different wartime groups ignored his order to reorganize and resisted serving under each other.[934]

The first major conflict between the Salafists and the secular government came over peace negotiations with Russia. This was a heuristic of a broader disagreement over goals for the new republic. Dudayev and Maskhadov had been careful to stress the nationalism in their project. Maskhadov's vision was that of an independent, healthy, sustainable, Western-oriented state that retain amicable ties and close economic links to Russia.[935] For one thing, Russia continued to pay pensions to Chechen retirees and veterans. With few social services of its own, the Chechen economy (and many of its people) was deeply dependent on these payments and on its energy links to Moscow. The treaty was very brief, a mere half a page, and focused only on establishing "mutually beneficial relations" and rejecting the use of force. The critical issue of Chechnya's political status was left unaddressed: the treaty said nothing about Chechnya's independence. The only clue was in point two, which cited the need for both nations "[t]o develop their relations on generally recognized principles and norms of international law."[936] That implied state relations. And in addition, Maskhadov signed the document

[933] Ilyas Akhmadov and Miriam Lanskoy, *The Chechen Struggle: Independence Won and Lost* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010), 97.
[934] Akhmedov and Lanskoy, 95.
[935] "Interview of the President of the ChRi Aslan Maskhadov," *Chechenpress* (February 27, 2001), http://www.radicalparty.org/en/content/interview-president-chri-aslan-maskhadov (accessed November 24, 2017).
[936] "Peace Treaty and Principles of Interrelation between Russian Federation and Chechen Republic Ichkeria," May 12, 1997, http://www.incore.ulst.ac.uk/services/cds/agreements-/pdf/rus2.pdf (accessed November 29, 2016).

as the President of the Chechen Republic of Ichkeria. But he did not force a confrontation with Russia over these points during negotiations.

The compromises inherent in the document were totally antithetical to the Salafists, and their opposition attracted other commanders. Yandarbayev and Salman Raduyev (a man widely considered one of the most unstable of the wartime commanders) criticized the negotiation of this treaty and announced their opposition to Maskhadov only a month after the election.[937] Basayev also broke with Maskhadov and left the government after the treaty was signed.[938] Udugov joined him. Gelayev and several other prominent guerrilla commanders resigned later in June over the same issues. These rejectionists were strengthened by Khattab and his networks of people, militants, and money.[939]

This schism with Maskhadov had the effect of shifting the bulk of the opposition's goals from simple nationalism to Islamist and transnational goals. In opposition, Basayev and others began to adopt pan-Islamic aims and set up operational alliances between their fighters and local Salafist communities. Yandarbayev, for example, founded the Caucasus Confederation in August 1997, which aimed at uniting all of the Caucasus nationalities against Russian rule. It had a paramilitary wing and participated in cross-border incursions into Dagestan.[940] In December 1997, Salman

[937] Sokirianskaya, 104.
[938] Williams (2015), 119.
[939] United States Department of State, Cable from Ambassador James Collins to Secretary of State Madeleine Albright, "Sharia Law in Chechnya: the Veil of Extremism," ID: 99MOSCOW2479_a (February 4, 1999), https://wikileaks.org/plusd/cables/99MOSCOW2479_a.html (accessed January 23, 2017).
[940] Tishkov, 201; Pokalova, 78.

Raduyev announced an alliance between his forces and the "Fighting Squads" of the *jamaats* of Dagestan, proclaiming their intent to form a unified Islamic state.[941]

With most of his wartime rivals in opposition by late 1997, Maskhadov tried to mitigate their political pressure by adopting some of the Salafists' goals himself. Sharia law was a key issue that increasingly united opposition figures like Basayev, Raduyev, and Yandarbayev. On November 5, 1997, Maskhadov declared Chechnya an Islamic republic, formally committed to the imposition of Islamic mores of dress and behavior.[942] Maskhadov made his pronouncement vague enough to attempt to avoid undercutting his own constitutional authority but still appeal to the radicals' followers. Earlier Chechen leaders had also played with this idea. Dudayev had ordered a commission to study the development of Islamic law in Chechnya, though he refrained from taking action. His more radical successor Yandarbayev went further, piloting the creation of sharia courts and calling for the supremacy of Islamic law before he was ousted.[943] Under Maskhadov's scheme, both secular and religious courts existed in parallel, with sharia judges receiving training by the Dagestani Salafist leader Bagautdin Kebedov.[944] Two military units were assigned to the courts, the Sharia Guards and Barayev's Islamic regiment, and were given wide latitude to police behavior like the consumption of alcohol, similar to the role of the morality police in Saudi Arabia.[945] Though Maskhadov

[941] Ware and Kisriev, 103.
[942] Edwin Walker, "Islam in Chechnya," Lecture at "Religion and Spirituality in Eastern Europe and the Former Soviet Union," Berkeley (March 13, 1998), http://isees.berkeley.edu/sites/default/files/u4/bp-s_/caucasus_/newsletter_/1998-06_walker.pdf (accessed March 9, 2017).
[943] Kristin Bakke, "Copying and learning from outsiders? Assessing diffusion from transnational insurgents in the Chechen wars," in *Transnational Dynamics of Civil War*, ed. Jeffrey Checkel (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2013), 44-45.
[944] Sokirianskaya, 106-107.
[945] Akhmadov and Lanskoy, 130.

had rejected sharia law as a candidate for president, he moved closer and closer to the militant position throughout his term.[946]

Unfortunately for him, Maskhadov's efforts to coopt some parts of the radicals' agenda made him appear to be condoning the others, particularly their cross-border incursions, which isolated him internationally. For Maskhadov, Islamic law was largely an internal phenomenon. But the more domestic Islamist goals Maskhadov adopted, the more he appeared to be supporting the radicals' pan-Islamic projects, which were much more likely to incur intense balancing by Russia. Shortly after Maskhadov declared Chechnya an Islamic republic, the radicals launched their first raid into Dagestan on December 27, 1997. Khattab and about 120 fighters joined local Dagestani militants in a cross-border attack against the Russian 136th Armor Brigade at its base in Buynksk, Dagestan.[947] The damage was actually relatively slight, with fourteen casualties and the destruction of dozens of armored vehicles.[948] But it was an embarrassment to Maskhadov. His government was preparing to host Boris Yeltsin's first visit to Chechnya, with the goal of turning a new page in relations with the Russian Federation and establishing its international bona fides as a member in good standing of the international community. The attack cratered those efforts.

Khattab's Buynksk raid seems to have been an inflection point in the way Russia thought about the Chechens. It spurred Moscow to a more urgent sense of the growing danger of Salafism in the new republic and the Caucasus as a whole. Lieutenant General Ivan Golubev, who headed the public order department of Russia's interior ministry and

[946] Pokalova, 83.
[947] Adam Geibel, "Khattab's audacious raid (22 December 1997): Prelude to the Second Chechen War," *Central Asian Survey* 19, issue 3-4 (2000): 341.
[948] Ware and Kisriev, 104.

led the investigation of the Buynksk attack, blamed the security situation on Fathi's Wahhabi communities like Karamakhi. "The gangsters concentrated in those settlements of Dagestan populated mostly by supporters of Wahhabism, an extreme movement of Islamic fundamentalism," he said.[949] Golubev's boss, Russian Interior Minister Anatoly Kulikov, demanded that the Chechen authorities take action against the camps that were being used to train gunmen and threatened Russia would do so if not.[950] Maskhadov in turn denied they existed.[951] One of Yeltsin's representatives to the Northern Caucasus pointed the finger at citizens from Middle Eastern and Western nations for sabotage operations and receiving training and other support from the intelligence organizations of their home countries, from camps which co-opt local inhabitants.[952] Other officials, including the Dagestani chief prosecutor, blamed coordinated attacks against the chief of the organized crime unit and others on Wahhabis from Chechnya working to form an Islamic state with their patron.[953] Dagestan subsequently banned Wahhabism in January of 1998: its parliament speaker said that the law would defend "norms of traditional Islam" and eliminate "propaganda of interreligious antagonism and prevent dissemination of Islamic fundamentalism in the territory of Daghestan."[954] Russian television began to

[949] "Federal Interior Ministry official vows to confront any repeat of Dagestan raid," *RIA* (December 30, 1997), https://advance-lexis-com.ezproxy.lib.utexas.edu/api/document?collection=news&id=urn:contentItem:3RNN-93H0-006F-X470-00000-00&context=1516831 (accessed April 20, 2020).
[950] Anatoly Verbin, "Russian minister takes hawkish stance on Chechnya," *Reuters* (January 6, 1998),
[951] "President Maskhadov – No bases exist to "train terrorists" in Chechnya," *Interfax* (January 7, 1998).
[952] "'North Caucasus of special interest to foreign secret services' – Russian official," *RIA* (January 6, 1996).
[953] "Prosecution official blames Chechens for bombings and shootings," *Interfax* (January 17, 1998), https://advance-lexis-com.ezproxy.lib.utexas.edu/api/document?collection=news&id=urn:contentItem:3RT7-WYG0-006F-X51V-00000-00&context=1516831 (accessed April 19, 2020).
[954] "Law placing ban on Islamic fundamentalism passed in Dagestan," *Turan News Agency* (January 4, 1998).

air programs about the increase in Islamism in Chechnya and the penetration of sharia law, highlighting Chechen students studying Islam in the Middle East.[955]

These warnings were not yet echoed by the senior Chechen authorities. For instance, on March 19, Chechnya's senior counterterrorism official blamed Islamic militants for the ongoing violence and said he was ready to confront them. Makhadov, however, quickly countermanded him.[956] After an attempt on the life of Georgian President Eduard Shevardnadze days later, the same official blamed foreigners who were allegedly financed by "eastern countries" and were trying to turn Chechnya into the hub of international terrorism.[957] Maskhadov fired him.

However, Maskhadov did seek to capitalize on the secular identity of the state he was trying to build. On the ground, external support made the Salafists powerful enough to contest Maskhadov's authority. In response to this threat, and in an effort to realize his own vision for Chechnya, Maskhadov sought Western support to balance the Salafists' power. It never arrived. No Western states recognized the new republic or helped it bolster its sovereign government. Maskhadov traveled to the United States and the United Kingdom to seek their recognition for his state, but neither acquiesced nor even granted him an audience with senior officials.[958] The Americans considered him weak and virtually powerless to influence events around him, despite the fact that some of his

[955] "Chechen students study Koran in Syria," *Russian Public TV* (January 16, 1998), https://advance-lexis-com.ezproxy.lib.utexas.edu/api/document?collection=news&id=urn:contentItem:3RTH-5F50-006F-X077-00000-00&context=1516831 (accessed April 19, 2020).
[956] "Chechen crime fighter accuses Islamic fundamentalists of hostage taking," *The Associated Press* (March 19, 1998).
[957] Igor Rotar, "Georgian terrorists were trained in Chechnya," *Nezavisimaya Gazeta* (March 26, 1998).
[958] Valery Tishkov, *Chechnya: Life in a War-Torn Society* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 2004), 125.

later decisions (on sharia, for example) maintained the same ambiguity that Dudayev's had.[959] His attempt later in the year to join the United Nations was also rebuffed.

Worse, radicals within Chechnya were able to thwart Maskhadov's foreign policy outreach through their tactical actions. Perhaps nothing was more harmful to his policies than Chechnya's kidnapping epidemic, as militants were able to isolate the Maskhadov government when the international community blamed him for their actions. Barayev, whose Islamic regiment in Urus-Martan had been recognized as the 29th Division of the Chechen army, was a particular problem. Barayev's forces were notorious for their lawlessness, smuggling, and kidnapping, and increasingly an embarrassment for the government. Khattab was also widely blamed for the rash of abductions.[960] Men, women, and children were taken, with ransom prices ranging from a few thousand dollars to millions for especially choice captives like NTV journalist Yelena Masyuk.[961] During the period of independence, there reached as many as 560 kidnapping hostages awaiting ransom in Chechnya.[962] These had strategic consequences, particularly beyond the Russian Federation and CIS. Kidnapping (especially foreigners) outraged the victims' home countries and deterred private investment, increasing

[959] United States Department of State, Cable from Ambassador James Collins to Secretary of State Madeleine Albright, "Sharia Law in Chechnya: the Veil of Extremism," ID: 99MOSCOW2479_a (February 4, 1999), https://wikileaks.org/plusd/cables/99MOSCOW2479_a.html (accessed January 23, 2017).
[960] United States Department of State, Cable from Ambassador James Collins to Secretary of State Madeleine Albright, "Sharia Law in Chechnya: the Vail of Extremism," ID: 99MOSCOW2479_a (February 4, 1999), https://wikileaks.org/plusd/cables/99MOSCOW2479_a.html (accessed January 23, 2017)
[961] Celestine Bohlen, "4 Foreigners Are Found Beheaded in Chechnya," *The New York Times* (December 9, 1998), http://www.nytimes.com/1998/12/09/world/4-foreigners-are-found-beheaded-in-chechnya.html (accessed February 15, 2017).
[962] Gilligan, 28.

Maskhadov's isolation, while monies gained from kidnapping enhanced the power of groups that participated in it.

In a further concession to the opposition, Maskhadov brought his old rivals back into the government, organizing a new cabinet in early 1998 that included Basayev as prime minister and Udugov as foreign minister. The shuffling backfired as the Salafists' goals took deeper root. Basayev grew closer to Udugov, the religious ideologue, and by April 1998 had joined with him and Yandarbayev to found the new extraterritorial group the Congress of Nations of Ichkeria and Dagestan.[963] This organization eventually included most of Maskhadov's opposition, including Chechen militant formations like Khattab's. It also united them operationally and ideologically with Dagestani *jamaats*, which were experiencing a Salafist movement of their own and helped radicalize Chechnya's leaders. Basayev's Congress aimed to unite Dagestan with Chechnya into a new independent state under sharia law. It served as a unifying umbrella organization for other militant groups, including Khattab's International Islamic Peacekeeping Brigade (IIPB).[964] The IIPB itself was an explicitly extraterritorial organization; it was intended to defend Muslims in areas where they were under attack by non-Muslim forces. By mid-1998, both renowned guerrilla leader Shamil Basayev and skilled propagandist Movladi Udugov were calling for the unification of the North Caucasus against Russian influence under an Islamic state.[965]

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[963] Akhmadov and Lanskoy, 136.
[964] Domitilla Sagramoso and Akhmet Yarlykapov, "Caucasian Crescent: Russia's Islamic Policies and its Responses to Radicalization," in *The Fire Below: How the Caucasus Shaped Russia*, ed. Robert Bruce Ware (New York: Bloomsbury, 2013), 60; Robert Bruce Ware, "Conclusion: How has the Caucasus Shaped Russia?" in *The Fire Below: How the Caucasus Shaped Russia*, ed. Robert Bruce Ware (New York: Bloomsbury, 2013), 289.
[965] Ali Askerov, *Historical Dictionary of the Chechen Conflict* (Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield, 2015), 73.

The battlefield competence of Salafist militants was high and often enough to overwhelm local authorities, particularly when different communities could reinforce each other. Under the leadership of the Jordanian Abdurakhman al-Zarqi, the villages of Karamakhi, Kadar, Chankurbe, and Chabanmakhi in central Dagestan had became centers of Wahhabi radicalism by 1998 with remarkably little federal opposition.[966] The area was home to an estimated 2,000 to 4,000 Wahhabi converts as well as fourteen Wahhabi madrassas.[967] Their first major challenge to state authority came on May 21, 1998, when militants seized the government building in Karamakhi (the home of Khattab's wife) and drove out the local police. The police reaction was ineffectual. A sizeable force of Dagestani government troops scrambled to respond, but were repelled by militants arriving to reinforce the local Wahhabis. A ceasefire agreement on May 25 left Karamakhi virtually autonomous and under its own governance.[968] Semi-governmental institutions like an Islamic governing council were created, and the militants received emissaries and other support from Chechen groups like Udugov's Congress.[969] Frightened and nonplussed, Dagestan's government publicly condemned outside groups from the Persian Gulf for conducting jihad against their republic.[970] However, Yeltsin sought to avoid a confrontation. Under an agreement struck by Russian Prime Minister Sergei Stepashin, the local Wahhabi leaders were permitted to govern themselves if they abandoned their claim to sovereignty in Dagestan or unity with Chechnya. They agreed.[973]

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[966] Cerwyn Moore, *Contemporary Violence: Post-Modern War in Kosovo and Chechnya* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2010), 147.
[967] Pokalova, 75; Ware and Kisriev, 100.
[968] Ware and Kisriev, 104.
[969] Pokalova, 79.
[970] Ware and Kisriev, 98.
[973] Gammer, 840.

Maskhadov's major counteroffensive against the growing power of the radicals came later that year. Long-simmering tension between the Maskhadov government and opposition Wahhabi elements escalated into a major confrontation near Gudermes on July 14, 1998. Here, the autonomy of Karamakhi in Dagestan empowered religious radicals in Chechnya. Gudermes was a stronghold of Chechen rebel commanders Arbi Barayev and others who had instituted elements of Sharia law, as well as a waypoint for Dagestani Salafists. A dispute with Maskhadov's National Guard forces exploded into violence that lasted for days and dragged in hundreds of fighters on each side.[974] Barayev's forces were joined by Dagestani militants from the Karamakhi *jamaat* and the Chechen Kurcholai *jamaat*, south of Gudermes. Chechen police under the control of Maskhadov's ally Sulim Yamadayev arrived the next day and besieged the town. Though the militants took the worst casualties, Barayev and his group eventually were permitted to surrender and leave the city. They left Gudermes and traveled to Urus-Martan, a key Barayev fiefdom.[975] Zarqi, who had travelled to Gudermes from Dagestan to help the radicals, was expelled from Chechnya, along with other leading Dagestani militants.

The events at Gudermes seem to have had the effect on the Chechen authorities that the Buynksk raid had had on the Russian orities in January. In response to the fighting, Maskhadov lashed out at the influence of Persian Gulf countries. In a televised address on July 15, Maskhadov blamed Arab countries for imposing a "foreign ideology" on his country. "Those behind this movement come to Chechnya from Arab countries,

[974] Vakhit Akaev, "Religious-Political Conflict in the Chechen Republic of Ichkeria," *Central Asia and the Caucasus Press*, http://www.ca-c.org/dataeng/05.akaev.shtml (accessed January 13, 2017).
[975] Moore (2010), 146.

call on people to start war and justify the kidnappings," he said. He continued, "I will soon throw out of Chechnya those who have come here to impose a foreign ideology on the Chechen people."[976] A day later he banned Wahhabism in Chechnya, following a move Dagestan had made six months earlier. He deported four foreigners accused of spreading Wahhabism and issued decrees disbanding the Sharia Guard and the Islamic Brigade, which were never implemented.[977] He also ordered all Arabs like Khattab out of the republic, which was similarly not enforced.[978] Maskhadov stripped Barayev of his military rank and called up 5,000 army reservists to crack down on kidnapping.[979] On August 2, during a trip to Turkey, Maskhadov took aim at Arab countries that were spreading Wahhabism in Chechnya. "After the war," he said, "some circles tried to stir up trouble in our country. Certain Arab countries tried to teach us Islam...we took the necessary steps and we did not allow them to foment unrest in our country." In August, group of leading clerics from the North Caucasus, including Chechnya's mufti Akhmad Kadyrov, created a joint coordinating center in Ingushetia specifically to combat Wahhabism, which Kadyrov called a foreign "plague" introduced to split up Islam.[980] On October 2, 1998, Maskhadov explicitly warned that Saudi Arabia was spreading and financing Islamic radicalism in the North Caucasus in an effort to combat Russian

[976] "Six dead as Chechen leader accuses fundamentalists of stirring up trouble," *Agence France Press* (July 15, 1998).
[977] "Maskhadov Denounces Rival Rebel Leaders," *Terrorism Monitor* 8, issue 11 (January 16, 2002), https://jamestown.org/program/maskhadov-denounces-rival-rebel-leaders/ (accessed December 29, 2016).
[978] Williams (2015), 131.
[979] Akaev, http://www.ca-c.org/dataeng/05.akaev.shtml (accessed January 13, 2017); Ian Jeffries, *The New Russia: A Handbook of Economic and Political Developments* (New York: Routledge-Curzon, 2002), 385.
[980] "Region's Muslims set up coordinating centre to fight 'plague' of radical Islam," *ITAR-TASS (*August 17, 1998), https://advance-lexis-com.ezproxy.lib.utexas.edu/api/document?collection=news&id=urn:-contentItem:3TDX-NMV0-006F-X385-00000-00&context=1516831 (accessed April 21, 2020).

influence, which posed a "serious threat" to Chechnya.[981] After failed attacks on the lead mufti of Chechnya and its anti-kidnapping chief, Yeltsin's envoy to the CIS blamed "political, financial and religious forces from Middle Eastern countries" for the attacks.[982]

However, due to Maskhadov's inability to attract Western support (partially itself due to the actions of the Salafists), this attempt to balance external influence actually backfired. His government had a final falling out with Riyadh. Saudi Arabia, Jordan, and the United Arab Emirates had been the only states that tacitly recognized Chechen independence. This recognition was somewhat tenuous: though multiple media outlets reported it, government officials from none of the three states would confirm.[983] After Maskhadov's call to expel Arabs from the republic, that support was withdrawn. There was an additional financial dispute as well: Saudi Arabia had been paying for cell phone coverage for Chechnya, and in the summer of 1998 that support was withdrawn, causing Russian cell companies to cut off coverage.[984]

Maskhadov's actions at Gudermes and subsequent turn against the Salafists' sponsors not only failed to [illegible]ct foreign support and incited Middle Eastern opposition, but left him alone in a weakened government. [illegible]ayev quit the government again. He informed his colleagues that he wished to die in jihad and went to live with Khattab at his camp to study religion.[985] The Dagestani leader Kebedov also moved to Serzhan-Yurt to

[981] "Maskhadov warns of US-Saudi 'threat' to Chechnya," *BBC* (October, 2 1998), http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/europe/185023.stm (accessed May 10, 1998).
[982] "Kremlin official sees Mideast hand in Chechnya attacks," *BBC* (October 26, 1998).
[983] Grant: 882.
[984] Robert Orttung, Danielle Lussier, and Anna Paretskaya eds., *The Republics and Regions of the Russian Federation: A Guide to Politics, Policies, and Leaders* (New York: Routledge, 2000), 76.
[985] Akhmadov and Lanskoy, 140, 142.

assist with Khattab's camps.[986] Udugov defected from the government as well and joined Yandarbayev in opposition. This time they established rival media organs to amplify their message, using the news agency Kavkaz Tsentr to promote Salafist ideas, glorify jihad, and attack Maskhadov.[987] As the government grew weaker, these organs would compete with official Chechen mouthpieces as the voice of the government. These campaigns undermined not just Maskhadov domestically but also his international outreach and message of stability.[988]

They also took more active measures, creating facts on the ground that forced Maskhadov's direction. A key blow to Maskhadov's external outreach came in December 1998, when Barayev's men kidnapped and beheaded three British telecommunications workers and their New Zealand colleague. Barayev later claimed he would receive more money from "his Arab friends" for their execution than from the British to secure their release.[989] The British government called the murders "repugnant;" the leader of next-door Muslim republic Ingushetia called them a "horrifying crime" committed "against the international community."[990] A well-known Russian journalist, earlier sympathetic to the Chechen predicament and a kidnapping victim herself, said that the epidemic had cost the republic all the sympathy it earned after Russia's war crimes.[991] Maskhadov's reinvigorated effort to address the kidnappings that fall was decapitated nearly immediately, when the head of his anti-kidnapping unit was

[986] Mairbek Vatchagaev, "The Dagestani Jamaat (Part 1)," *North Caucasus Weekly* 8, issue 48 (December 13, 2007), https://jamestown.org/program/the-dagestani-jamaat-part-1/ (accessed March 30, 2017).
[987] Moore (2010), 147.
[988] Akhmadov and Lanskoy, 184.
[989] Gold, 138.
[990] Celestine Bohlen, "4 Foreigners Are Found Beheaded In Chechnya," *The New York Times* (December 9, 1998), http://www.nytimes.com/1998/12/09/world/4-foreigners-are-found-beheaded-in-chechnya.html (accessed November 27, 2017).
[991] Ibid.

killed with a car bomb shortly after the campaign began. The first assassination attempt on Maskhadov also followed.[992]

Isolated abroad and under siege at home, Maskhadov swung back the other way, and capitulated totally to the radicals' estic goals. He announced full Sharia law for Chechnya on February 3, 1999, and ordered the drafting of an Islamic constitution similar to Sudan's.[993] He also disbanded parliament and created an Islamic shura council that would consult with him on policy, a key demand of the opposition. The shura included Basayev and Yandarbayev.[994] Stability did not come, however. Basayev, Udugov, and the others quickly decried Maskhadov's organization as not Islamic enough. They abandoned it and created their own rival policymaking government.[995]

However, it was the transnational goals of the radicals – east deniable – that ultimately sparked Russian intervention and the second Chechen war. Operationalizing these goals involved transgressing demarcated state boundaries with large groups of men and made the irregular, subversive warfare that the militants could conduct effectively more like conventional aggression. In July 1999, a group of Dagestani militants attempted to expand their control of the Karamakhi area into the neighboring Tsumadinski district in Dagestan.[996] They killed several members of the federal MVD in

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[992] Sokirianskaya, 111.
[993] United States Department of State, Cable from Ambassador James Collins to Secretary of State Madeleine Albright, "Sharia Law in Chechnya: the Veil of Extremism," ID: 99MOSCOW2479_a (February 4, 1999), https://wikileaks.org/plusd/cables/99MOSCOW2479_a.html (accessed January 23, 2017); Robert Bruce Ware, "A Multitude of Evils: Mythology and Political Failure in Chechnya," in *Chechnya: From Past to Future*, ed. Richard Sakwa (London: Anthem Press, 2005), 99.
[994] United States Department of State, Cable from Ambassador James Collins to Secretary of State Madeleine Albright, "Sharia, Shura, and Statehood in Chechnya," ID: 99MOSCOW4277_a (February 26, 1999), https://wikileaks.org/plusd/cables/99MOSCOW4277_a.html (accessed January 24, 2107).
[995] "Chechnya Power Struggle," *BBC* (February 9, 1999), http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/europe/276075.stm (accessed February 19, 2017).
[996] Pokalova, 92.

fighting on August 4 and Moscow rushed in reinforcements, blocking off roads around the area. Three days later, Basayev and Khattab led hundreds of Chechen militants into Dagestan to support the besieged fighters.[997] This time the transgression of sovereignty was significant and occurred on multiple levels: there was the violation of the Chechen-Dagestan border, as well as the violation of the Dagestani district line. These actions were also perpetrated by a large group of Chechens. All of this served to  ease the significance of their violation of Russia's sovereignty and provoke a greater reaction. Correspondingly, it incited intense Russian balancing that escalated into invasion.

Russian troops used artillery and airstrikes with fuel-air explosives to subdue the occupied area, while local police engaged the militants on the ground.[998] As the conflict worsened, Yeltsin fired Stepashin as prime minister and replaced him with Vladimir Putin. Maskhadov attempted to disassociate himself one last time from the pan-Islamic goals of the Salafists. He condemned the Salafist incursion but refused (or was more realistically unable) to take action against the perpetrators. Under heavy attack from Russian airstrikes, Khattab's Chechen fighters began to withdraw from Dagestan on August 23. Without support from the Chechens, the remaining Dagestani militants were quickly overrun. Russian forces proceeded to cordon off and eliminate Salafist enclaves in Karamakhi and other Islamist villages. Russia's foreign minister sent a formal letter to the Organization of Islamic Countries warning them not to support the separatists in Dagestan, saying there was proof the Chechens were receiving outside support.[999] After a week, virtually all Dagestani territory was back under federal control. Following a

[997] Tumelty (2006), https://jamestown.org/program/the-rise-and-fall-of-foreign-fighters-in-chechnya/ (accessed March 4, 2017).
[998] Schaefer, 183.
[999] "Stay out of Dagestan, Russia tells Islamic States," *Reuters* (August 14, 1999).

series of bombings in Russia throughout September, which Moscow chose to blame on Chechen Salafists and Khattab, Russian aircraft began bombing Chechnya.[1000]

The Second Chechen War, 2000-2003

The second Chechen war was fought in a far different strategic context for both proxy and sponsor than the first one. The biggest change was the degree of international balancing against the Salafists and Saudi Arabia. In November 1999, Saudi Arabia's interior minister, Prince Mohammed bin Nayef, rejected accusations that Saudi Arabia was financing the militants.[1001] But extraterritorial attacks by Salafists – related to Chechnya or not – created a strong reaction against the kind of Saudi private sector funding and institutions that until then had been tolerated. Of course, no greater shift occurred than after the terrorist attacks of September 11th. This resulted in US pressure on the Saudis to reduce their support for radicalism, which they did, and spurred US sanctions on the separatists.[1002] The opening of America's Afghanistan war in 2001 and particularly Iraq in 2003 offered more compelling causes for jihadists than Chechnya, which was both hard to reach and still culturally alien to Middle Easterners. The brutality of Salafist terrorist attacks within Russia also served to reduce the rebels' support. Not least, the Kingdom became more concerned with its own domestic revolutionary threat

[1000] Karen Dawisha, *Putin's Kleptocracy: Who Owns Russia?* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2015), 208; Mark Kramer, "The Perils of Counterinsurgency: Russia's War in Chechnya," *International Security* 29, no. 3 (Winter, 2004/2005): 7; Pokalova, 95.
[1001] Charles Recknagel, "Russia: Islamic Countries Unlikely to Help Chechnya," *Radio Free Europe* (November 19 1999), https://www.rferl.org/a/1092708.html (accessed November 21, 2017).
[1002] James Dao, "Saudis Brush Aside Criticism Of Record Against Terrorism," *The New York Times* (December 4, 2002), http://www.nytimes.com/2002/12/04/world/threats-responses-arab-ally-saudis-brush-aside-criticism-record-against.html (accessed January 4, 2017); Paul Tumelty, "The Rise and Fall of Foreign Fighters in Chechnya," *Terrorism Monitor* 4, issue 2 (January 31, 2006), https://jamestown.org/program/the-rise-and-fall-of-foreign-fighters-in-chechnya/ (accessed March 13, 2017).

from Al-Qaeda, especially after the bombings in 2003.[1003] Between those and anti-terrorist measures imposed after 9/11, its support for private sector jihadism was greatly scaled back.

Operationally, the Chechen rebels were also far more divided than they had been in 1994, largely due to the successful cooption of the Chechen state by the Salafists. Akhmed Kadyrov, the republic's chief mufti and a former secessionist, opposed the Salafist incursion into Dagestan and quickly broke with the government. He called on Chechens not to oppose the Russian invasion and was promptly fired by Maskhadov.[1004] Kadyrov joined a coalition of Chechens that were pro-Russian and anti-Salafist, including another Maskhadov ally Sulim Yamadayev who had fought at Gudermes in 1998. This group gave Russia a significant base of Chechen support it had not enjoyed during the first war.

Russia fought the second war differently in important ways. For one, the Russian government retained tight control of the information space through media offices in Moscow and North Ossetia. Unlike in the first war, entry to Chechnya was forbidden without explicit permission. Russian media officials suggested language for journalists to use about the conflict and issued veiled threats to those who ventured out on their own.[1010] Russia also employed nearly 100,000 troops in the initial invasion, three times

[1003] Hegghammer (July 2008): 714.
[1004] "Obituaries: Akhmad Kadyrov, Russian-backed President of Chechnya," *The Independent* (May 10, 2004), http://www.independent.co.uk/news/obituaries/akhmad-kadyrov-38461.html (accessed March 11, 2017).
[1009] Michael Gordon, "Russian Army Says Chechen Resistance Is Growing Stiffer," *The New York Times* (November 30, 1999), https://partners.nytimes.com/library/world/europe/113099russia-chechnya.html (accessed March 8, 2017).
[1010] Laura Belin, "Russian Media Policy in the First and Second Chechen Campaigns," Paper at 52nd Conference of the Political Studies Association, Aberdeen (April 5-8, 2002), 21-22, http://www.info-america.org/documentos_pdf/rusia.pdf (accessed February 16, 2017).

more than in 1994. By early 2000, that number would increase to 140,000 against an estimated 12,000-15,000 Chechen fighters.[1011] As Russian forces moved further south, they used artillery extensively and preemptively to soften up potential strongpoints in villages, as they had done in Dagestan two months earlier.[1012]

They reached the outskirts of Grozny on October 15 and began preparations for a siege. The Yamadayev brothers negotiated the surrender of Gudermes without a fight on November 11.[1013] Urus-Martan, a key center of Chechen resistance southwest of Grozny, fell to Russian forces in early December.[1014] By December 4, the Russian theater commander General Viktor Kazantsev announced that his forces had completely surrounded the capital.[1015] On December 13, Russian troops took control of Grozny's airport to the east of the city in Khankala. Maskhadov called for negotiations the next day, which Moscow declined.[1016] In an interview, Putin outlined three preconditions to any political negotiation: Maskhadov must renounce terrorism, ensure the release of kidnapping victims, and bring the perpetrators of the Dagestan raid to justice.[1017] Eliminate the radicals, in other words.

[1011] David Hoffman, "Russians Stymied in Grozny," *Washington Post* (December 16, 1999), http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-srv/WPcap/1999-12/16/051r-121699-idx.html (accessed February 9, 2017); Jim Nichol, "Russia's Chechen Conflict: An Update," *Congressional Research Service* Report RL31620 (April 16, 2003), https://file.wikileaks.org/file/crs/RL31620.pdf (accessed February 7, 2017).
[1012] Lester Grau and Timothy Thomas, "Russian Lessons Learned From the Battles For Grozny," *Marine Corps Gazette* 84 (April 2000), http://fmso.leavenworth.army.mil/documents/Rusn_leslrn.htm (accessed March 19, 2017); Pavel Felgenhauer, "Russia's Forces Unreconstructed," *Perspective* X, no. 4 (March-April 2000), http://www.bu.edu/iscip/vol10/Felgenhauer.html (accessed March 20, 2017).
[1013] Williams (2015), 163.
[1014] Jeffries, 412.
[1015] "Russia denies killings during Grozny assault," *BBC* (December 5, 1999), http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/europe/550802.stm (accessed December 30, 2016).
[1016] Patrick Cockburn, "War in Chechnya: Chemical weapons fear haunts Chechens," *The Independent* (December 15, 1999), http://www.independent.co.uk/news/world/war-in-chechnya-chemical-weapons-fear-haunts-chechens-1132554.html (accessed February 8, 2017).
[1017] Jeffries, 412.

Russia's plan for assaulting Grozny involved capitalizing on the divisions among Chechens operationally as well as politically. Bislan Gantemirov, for example, was a former mayor of Grozny who commanded a small force of militia that would act as pathfinders for Russian forces as they advanced into the city. As they closed in, federal troops began probing the interior of the city. The large Russian troop presence around Grozny also meant that soldiers could be quickly rotated in and out of the fighting for one-week deployments to sustain morale.[1018] Airpower was used extensively, as well as the fuel-air explosives that had been used to eliminate the insurgents in Dagestan in the fall. However, despite improvements in Russian urban combat capabilities, the fighting quickly devolved into house-to-house combat reminiscent of the first campaign for Grozny.[1019]

Tactically, the Chechens remained highly capable. The city's estimated 2,000-2,500 defenders formed mobile detachments consisting of three- to five-man fire teams that infiltrated secure areas of the city to ambush Russian forces.[1020] Poor communications prevented the effective use of airstrikes, as pilots had to maneuver around troops from different ministries as well as friendly Chechen units.[1021] Russian tank columns were leery of entering the city; when they did they were punished. On December 15, Chechen forces cut off and nearly annihilated an armored column in the strategic Minutka Square, south of the central river in Grozny.[1022] As the Grozny

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[1018] Oliker, 51, 59.
[1019] Schaefer, 190.
[1020] Oliker, 68; Grau and Thomas, http://fmso.leavenworth.army.mil/documents/Rusn_leslrn.htm (accessed March 23, 2017).
[1021] Cockburn, http://www.independent.co.uk/news/world/war-in-chechnya-chemical-weapons-fear-haunts-chechens-1132554.html (accessed February 8, 2017).
[1022] Oliker, 48-49, 101; Chris Shephard, "Understanding the Guerilla" (law seminar paper, Kent State Law School, May 2005), http://www.kentlaw.edu/perritt/courses/seminar/2005-spring-papers/chris-s-consolidated.htm#_ftn116 (accessed February 10, 2017).

operation dragged through January and then into February, the Russian death toll rose from 400 to 1,500 to as high as 3,000.[1023]

Source: Emil Pain, *Military Review* (July-August 2000)

By late January, the sheer weight of Russian resources, marshaled more effectively than in 1994, began to overwhelm the defenders. When the time came to retreat, Russian FSB operatives reportedly offered the remaining Chechens a ceasefire and a corridor out of the city in exchange for $100,000. They were led west into a

[1023] Felgenhauer, http://www.bu.edu/iscip/vol10/Felgenhauer.html (accessed March 24, 2017); Tim Youngs, "The Conflict in Chechnya," *United Kingdom House of Commons Library*, Research Paper 00/14 (February 7, 2000), 20.

minefield and then ambushed by Russian troops, suffering an estimated 600 losses.[1024] By February, Russia's military operations in Grozny were largely finished though sporadic ambushes from snipers and booby traps continued for months.[1025] The heaviest fighting shifted to the south as Russian forces attempted to cut off retreating Chechen formations before they could reach the Argun and Vedeno Gorges, areas which could support a sustained guerrilla campaign.

The most intense pitched battles came with the most operationally capable elements, the Salafists. In late February, Russian airborne troops attempted to encircle Khattab, Abu Walid, and about 1,600-2,500 fighters (including many Arabs) in the village of Ulus-Kert, thirty-five kilometers south of Grozny. Under pressure, the Chechens retreated out of the town and made their way four kilometers southeast through a ravine, where they found a vastly outgunned 6th Company of the 104th Guards Parachute Regiment waiting for them. The ninety paratroopers, attempting to dig in between two hills flanking the gorge, were caught in the open and pushed back to a single hilltop.[1026] Waves of well-armed Chechen fighters assaulted the hill for four days, as enemy fire and bad weather prevented Russian relief forces and air support from reaching the besieged company. All but seven of the defenders were killed by the time reinforcements arrived on March 3.[1027]

The second major post-Grozny engagement came on March 7. A large force of 600-1,000 Chechens under Ruslan Gelayev had retreated south to the mountains before

[1024] Schaefer, 191; Mark Galeotti, *Russia's Wars in Chechnya 1994-2009* (New York: Osprey Publishing, 2014), 60.
[1025] Schaefer, 192.
[1026] Sergeant Michael Wilmoth and Lieutenant Colonel Peter Tsouras, ret., "Ulus-Kert: An Airborne Company's Last Stand," *Military Review* (July-August 2001): 93.
[1027] Wilmoth and Tsouras: 93-94.

doubling back due to a lack of supplies.[1028] They fought through a cordon of Russian motorized infantry troops to reach Gelayev's hometown of Komsomalskoye, about 25 kilometers south of Grozny. Russian forces quickly surrounded the village and began leveling fire into the village, using airstrike, incendiary fuel-air explosives, and armored vehicles.[1029] Gelayev's fighters held out for nearly two weeks before surrendering on March 20.[1030] Sporadic resistance continued throughout the month, and Gelayev himself escaped.[1031]

Komsomalskoye effectively represented the last example of large-scale conflict in the war. In March, Putin was elected President of Russia, replacing the ailing Yeltsin. On June 12, Putin appointed the loyalist cleric Akhmad Kadyrov president of the new Chechnya. With Grozny, Gudermes, and Urus-Martan in its hands, Moscow did not seem particularly interested in negotiating a political settlement with the remaining separatists. And with whom would it negotiate? The radicalization of the remaining Chechen resistance and the changing international environment delegitimized the Chechens as negotiating partners, reducing their potential external support even from Saudi Arabia. Putin finally offered talks in September 2001, and representatives of the two sides met two months later.[1032] After inconclusive discussions in Moscow, further

[1028] Mayerbek Nunayev and Robyn Dixon, "Fatigue Thins Chechen Rebels' Ranks," *Los Angeles Times* (April 3, 2000), http://articles.latimes.com/2000/apr/03/news/mn-15455 (accessed February 9, 2017).
[1029] Oliker, 78.
[1030] Anna Politkovskaya, "Anna Politkovskaya Tells," interview by Marcin Wojciechowski, *Wyborcza* (May 26, 2004), http://wyborcza.pl/1,75399,2094754.html (accessed February 11, 2017);
[1031] Ramzan Akhmadov, "The bloodiest battle of the second Chechen war," *Prague Watchdog* (March 5, 2008), http://www.watchdog.cz/?show=000000-000005-000004-000158&lang=1 (accessed February 12, 2017); Askerov, 63.
[1032] "Moscow opens Chechen peace talks," *BBC* (November 18, 2001), http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/europe/1662859.stm (accessed February 12, 2017).

talks were postponed indefinitely. Russia subsequently requested that the chief Chechen negotiator be extradited from Britain to face criminal charges.[1033]

As a balancing action, Russia's war was genuinely brutal. By the time widespread Russian counterinsurgency operations officially ended in 2002, the Chechen campaign had resulted in more than 14,000 Chechen fighters killed as well as 4,500 Russian troops. Estimates of civilian deaths ranged between 10,000 and 80,000.[1034] By Russia's own admission, hundreds of Chechen civilians vanished every year at the hands of Russian security forces.[1035] But there was no surge in support for the remaining Chechens.

This was a key strategic problem the Chechens faced: they had no friends. The war had initially sparked a response from the international community. Saudi Arabia had been an early critic of the conflict, calling Moscow's actions "inhumane" and demanding ethnic self-determination in Chechnya.[1036] The IMF postponed a scheduled loan to Russia, and the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe suspended Russia's voting membership in 2000.[1037] But the prominence of the Salafists hampered Maskhadov's ability to muster international opposition to Russia as the fighting escalated. After the war started, he harshly criticized Yandarbayev for travelling to

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[1033] Nichol (2003), https://file.wikileaks.org/file/crs/RL31620.pdf (accessed February 7, 2017).
[1034] Nichol (2003), https://file.wikileaks.org/file/crs/RL31620.pdf (accessed February 7, 2017).
[1035] Human Rights Watch, "Worse than a War: "Disappearances" in Chechnya – a Crime against Humanity" (March, 2005), http://pantheon.hrw.org/legacy/backgrounder/eca/chechnya0305/chechnya0305.pdf (accessed April 1, 2017).
[1036] "Bloody end to Chechen hijack," *BBC* (March 16, 2001), http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/middle_east/-1223972.stm (accessed February 4, 2017).
[1037] "European Human Rights Organization Accused of Secretly Supporting Chechen Rebels," *Monitor* 6, issue 102 (May 24, 2000), https://jamestown.org/program/european-human-rights-organization-accused-of-secretly-supporting-chechen-rebels/ (accessed April 2, 2017); Jim Nichol, "Chechnya Conflict: Recent Developments," in *Russia in Transition, Volume 1*, ed. Frank Columbus (Hauppauge: Nova Science Publishers Inc., 2003), 48.

Afghanistan to seek recognition from the Taliban, which he felt would alienate the Western states necessary to force Russia into a ceasefire.[1038] Maskhadov's aides also publicly blasted Saudi Arabia for funding the radicals.[1039]

As time went on, genuine Western concerns over Chechen independence and Russian human rights violations faded in comparison with their concerns over Islamic terrorism, foreign fighters, and funding from the Persian Gulf. This concern became acute after the September 11 attacks in the United States, and led to US officials changing their approach to Chechnya and the Salafists significantly. During a press briefing on July 23, 2001, for example, US National Security Advisor Condoleezza Rice hewed to the traditional US line that Russian human rights abuses were the priority concern of the US, and did not even mention terrorism.[1042] Two months later, that was completely reversed. In a press briefing on September 26, Ari Fleischer cited the problem of an "international terrorist presence" and quoted the President as demanding that "The Chechnya leadership, like all responsible political leaders in the world, must immediately and unconditionally cut all contacts with international terrorist groups, such as Osama bin Laden and the al Qaeda organization…The President welcomes the sincere steps that have been taken by Russia to engage the Chechen leadership and…respect for human rights and accountability for violations on all sides is crucial to a durable peace there."[1043] When asked if his thinking on Chechnya had changed, Bush summed up this new line: "…our initial phase of the war on terrorism is against the al Qaeda organization. And we

[1038] Pokalova, 112.
[1039] Shireen Hunter, Jeffrey Thomas, and Alexander Melikishvili, *Islam in Russia: the Politics of Identity and Security* (Armonk: M.E. Sharpe, 2004), 529.
[1042] The White House, "Press Briefing by National Security Advisor Condoleeza Rice" (July 23, 2001).
[1043] The White House, "Press Briefing by Ari Fleischer" (September 26, 2001), https://georgewbush-whitehouse.archives.gov/news/releases/2001/09/20010926-5.html (accessed October 30, 2020).

do believe there are some al Qaeda folks in Chechnya…And so I would hope that the Russian President, while dealing with the al Qaeda organization, also respects minority rights within his [redacted]ntry."[1044] This was a far cry from the denunciations of Russian actions during the first war. Instead, the US and other Western governments now besieged Chechen representatives over their government's ties to Islamic radicals like Khattab.[1045] The Council of Europe restored Russia's voting membership only a year after it had been stripped.[1046]

This collapse of international support was accelerated by the remaining rebels' increasing adoption of terrorist attacks. After Khattab was killed in 2002, his close friend Basayev became the key operational driver of Chechen resistance.[1048] Basayev promptly announced targeted terrorist attacks against Russian cities that sent recruits to military units in Chechnya. Suicide bombings also began to increase rapidly.[1049] Unlike the first war, however, these attacks accelerated their defeat. Two attacks particularly horrified the Russian public and international community. On October 23, 2002, about forty armed Chechens under the command of Arbi Barayev's nephew Mosvar Barayev seized the Dubrovka Theatre in Moscow. Russian security officials later claimed that the

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[1044] The White House, "President Meets with Muslim Leaders," (September 26, 2001), https://georgewbush-whitehouse.archives.gov/news/releases/2001/09/20010926-8.html (accessed October 28, 2020).
[1045] Akhmadov and Lanskoy, 196.
[1046] "European Human Rights Organization Accused of Secretly Supporting Chechen Rebels," *Monitor* 6, issue 102 (May 24, 2000), https://jamestown.org/program/european-human-rights-organization-accused-of-secretly-supporting-chechen-rebels/ (accessed April 2, 2017); Jim Nichol, "Chechnya Conflict: Recent Developments," in *Russia in Transition, Volume 1*, ed. Frank Columbus (Hauppauge: Nova Science Publishers Inc., 2003), 48.
[1048] John Daniszewski, "Poison Hidden in a Letter May Have Killed Rebel in Chechnya," *Los Angeles Times* (May 1, 2002), http://articles.latimes.com/2002/may/01/world/fg-poison1 (accessed February 10, 2017); "Khattab Killed, Claims An Unnamed FSB Official," *Terrorism Monitor* 8, issue 72 (April 12, 2002), https://jamestown.org/program/khattab-killed-claims-an-unnamed-fsb-official/ (accessed February 15, 2017).
[1049] Akhmadov and Lanskoy, 217.

terrorists made several calls to Saudi Arabia and other states in the Gulf.[1050] After three days of negotiations, Russian forces saturated the theater with an unknown soporific gas before assaulting it, killing all of the terrorists but also one hundred and thirty of the hostages.[1051] Though the Russian government came under heavy criticism for its handling of the attack, Dubrovka was deeply harmful to the Chechen cause abroad, particularly in the post 9/11 United States which promptly sanctioned the groups involved. A second major terrorist incident at a school in Beslan, guided by Basayev and with the support of Afghan Arab financier Al-Kuwaiti, damaged the Chechen cause irreparably.[1052]

After Dubrovka, Maskhadov condemned Udugov and other Salafists for instigating Chechnya's collapse. He lamented they had wasted their energy on ideological projects for the region like the Congress of Nations rather than focus on strengthening the Chechen state.[1053] However, he had little influence remaining among the remaining resistance. Maskhadov was forced to moot a UN ceasefire plan proposed by his foreign minister, saying the increasing religiosity of the fighters would not permit more cooperation or concessions to Western democracies.[1054]

To make matters worse, the collapse in Western support also affected the Chechens' support from Islamic nations. Under intense US pressure, Saudi Arabia

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[1050] Nick Paton Walsh, "Chechen rebels phoned Gulf during siege," *The Guardian* (December 4, 2002), https://www.theguardian.com/world/2002/dec/05/chechnya.nickpatonwalsh (accessed February 6, 2017).
[1051] "Gas 'killed Moscow hostages,'" *BBC* (October 27, 2002), http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/europe/2365383.-stm (accessed February 7, 2017).
[1052] Cerwyn Moore and Paul Tumelty, "Unholy Alliances in Chechnya: From Communism and Nationalism to Islamism and Salafism," *Journal of Communist Studies and Transition Politics* 25, no. 1 (March 2009): 73-94.
[1053] "Maskhadov Denounces Rival Rebel Leaders," *Monitor* 8, issue 11 (January 16, 2002), https://jamestown.org/program/maskhadov-denounces-rival-rebel-leaders/ (accessed February 8, 2017).
[1054] Akhmadov and Lanskoy, 212-213.

committed in 2002 to eliminate the private funding that bled into militancy and more closely police its humanitarian foundations. Saudi money for Chechnya subsequently dropped sharply.[1055] The Kingdom's support for Chechnya dried up almost completely after the death of Khattab's successor Abu Walid two years later.[1056] In early 2003, the United States placed financial sanctions on the Chechen Salafists, a step it had not taken before. It designated Khattab's International Islamic Peacekeeping Brigade a Foreign Terrorist Organization, along with Barayev's Special Purpose Islamic Regiment and Basayev's Riyad us-Salikhin Reconnaissance and Sabotage Battalion of Chechen Martyrs, a small group of suicide bombers.

III. Conclusion and Additional Analysis

Any strategic assessment of Saudi Arabia's proxy warfare in Chechnya first hinges on whether this is a fair case to include. Is it fair to categorize the Saudi regime as a proxy sponsor of the Chechen Salafists like Khattab? This question has the danger of

[1055] James Dao, "Saudis Brush Aside Criticism Of Record Against Terrorism," *The New York Times* (December 4, 2002), http://www.nytimes.com/2002/12/04/world/threats-responses-arab-ally-saudis-brush-aside-criticism-record-against.html (accessed January 4, 2017); Paul Tumelty, "The Rise and Fall of Foreign Fighters in Chechnya," *Terrorism Monitor* 4, issue 2 (January 31, 2006), https://jamestown.org/program/the-rise-and-fall-of-foreign-fighters-in-chechnya/ (accessed March 13, 2017).
[1056] Muhammad al-Ubaydi, "Khattab: 1969-2002," *Jihadi Bios Project*, Combating Terrorism Center at West Point (February 2015), 20, https://www.ctc.usma.edu/v2/wp-content/uploads/2015/03/CTC_Khattab-Jihadi-Bio-February2015-3.pdf (accessed March 15, 2017).
[1059] "Chechnya's referendum: The vote of the dead souls," *The Economist* (March 27, 2003), http://www.economist.com/node/1668236 (accessed February 20, 2017).
[1060] Hunter et al., 240.
[1061] "Kadyrov Bans Wahhabism in Chechnya," *Monitor* 6, issue 145 (July 26, 2000), https://jamestown.org/program/kadyrov-bans-wahhabism-in-chechnya/ (accessed February 16, 2017); Pokalova, 131.
[1062] Nichol (2003), 11.
[1063] U.S. Congress, Commission on Security and Cooperation in Europe, *Statement by Deputy Assistant Secretary for European Affairs Steven Pifer*, 107th Cong., 2nd sess. (May 9, 2002), https://2001-2009.state.gov/p/eur/rls/rm/2002/10034.htm (accessed February 20, 2017).
[1064] Hunter et al, 240.

resurrecting the ideologically leaden debates about whether Soviet-era groups like Baader-Meinhof and the PLO were Russian puppets or  In the Chechen case, some scholars would say no: they would say that some degree of control is necessary for either the definition of a proxy or the effectiveness of proxy warfare. For them, the relationship between the Saudi state and scattered Islamist militants would be too distant, with no communication or real bonds between the two beyond a common liturgy. For the purposes of this dissertation's argument, however, it is appropriate to treat this relationship between the Chechen Salafists and Saudi Arabia as one type of proxy link. The Kingdom had little control over local Salafists or the Afghan Arabs in the Caucasus: that is without question. What control there was came from increasing and decreasing the amount of funding going to Saudi Salafist institutions, as well as perhaps guidance put out through the Kingdom's clerical networks of sermons and preaching. This did offer an incentive for the militants, however imperfectly effective and however minor. But this dissertation makes no claim upon the necessity of controlling a proxy: it simply assesses the effectiveness of more or less close relationships, of which control is one part. The chain of linkage to Saudi Arabia, and why this is an appropriate case, is then clear. Saudi Arabia provided a vast amount of support to Salafist institutions, and through them to both Salafists in the Caucasus and the Afghan Arabs, a number of whom travelled to Chechnya. The Afghan Arabs were key influencers in determining the course of the separatist project, and the Salafist movement a key influencer of Islam and Islamism in the Caucasus. Over the decade, the Afghan Arabs and Islamist proselytizers drew from a pool of Salafist recruits and money that was ever growing, giving them and their

movement often-decisive weight. Since their goals and the goals of the Saudi state overlapped, actions by the Salafists often advanced Riyadh's aims.

So how to assess the Salafists' effectiveness for Saudi Arabia in Chechnya? By the start of Putin's second term in 2004, the original Chechen cause of separatism was in shambles. Chechnya's independence had vanished and the separatists had been irrevocably tarnished by atrocities at Dubrovka and Beslan. Most of their major leadership figures were subsequently killed off, one by one. Raduyev had been captured in 2000 and died in a Russian penal colony. Gelayev was fatally shot during a raid into Dagestan in 2004. Yandarbayev was assassinated in Qatar the same year. Maskhadov was killed by Russian intelligence in 2005, and Basayev died from an explosion in 2006. Of the major political actors during Chechnya's independence period, Udugov the propagandist alone remained on the run.

But Russia's battlefield success in the second Chechen war came after a decade of Salafist success in Chechnya. From 1991-2000, Chechnya had achieved its independence and become a significant bleeding sore that weakened the security of Russia's southern border. The Salafists played a supporting role in the first war and then a dominant role in the interwar years as the most operationally capable force on the battlefield. And with regards to weakening Russia, there was still a strong case that Saudi Arabia came out ahead even if the ending of the second war were taken into account. Up against the cost of supporting private Islamist institutions, which provided endogenous benefits to the state anyway, there was the benefit of costing Russia a fortune in men, money, and prestige with a forced fifteen-year on-again off-again counterinsurgency in the Caucasus. The Chechen conflict had nearly lost Yeltsin his presidency and helped tarnish US

goodwill towards Russia after the demise of the USSR. And Russia was still an enemy; perhaps not the ideological Soviet threat that had posed an existential danger during the Cold War, but still a major power with profoundly dissimilar aims than Riyadh, including in the Gulf. Purely as a cost-benefit analysis, and even given the loss of independent Chechnya, Saudi Arabia appeared to have inflicted significant and disproportionate costs on an historic enemy, arguably worthwhile for its investiture.

By the time the second war broke out, the Salafists had won their battle for the ideological orientation of the republic, the third key Saudi goal. The Chechen cause became theirs. Chechnya became increasingly Islamist, in legal code and social mores. Major figures in Chechnya like Basayev adopted Islamist goals, including expanding their *jamaat* networks beyond the republican borders of Chechnya elsewhere in the North Caucasus. This Salafist absorption of the Chechen separatist movement reached its zenith in 2006 when Doku Umarov was chosen as the remaining rebels' leader. In 2007, with Udugov's support, he abolished his office and the state altogether. Instead of president, Umarov would reign as emir over the Caucasus Emirate, a transnational Islamic state under Islamic law stretching throughout the North Caucasus.[1065] If it is posited that Saudi Arabia benefited from Salafist regimes and social mores – and it did by definition, since it created institutions to sustain them – then it certainly gained from the growth in Salafism through the dozen years of Chechen independence.

The transnational aspects of the Kingdom's third goal were also achieved, but in a slightly different way. The pan-Islamic currents in Saudi Salafism took off and coopted

[1065] Emil Souleimanov, "The Caucasus Emirate: Genealogy of an Islamist Insurgency," *Middle East Policy Council* XVIII, no. 4 (Winter 2011), http://www.mepc.org/journal/middle-east-policy-archives/caucasus-emirate-genealogy-islamist-insurgency?print (accessed March 24, 2017).

communities during the 1990's throughout the Caucasus. Some of the autonomous enclaves of Salafism were lost after the second Chechen war, which replaced Chechen state authority with Russian. There was a crucial difference, however, between the Islamic vision of Saudi Arabia and the Islamic vision of the radicals. Though the geopolitical effect of a pan-Islamic state could potentially benefit Saudi Arabia in relation to its two primary goals, the resulting religious legitimacy of such a state could pose a direct threat to the Kingdom itself. Saudi Arabia would benefit from an Islamic state rising in Chechnya and Dagestan within national strictures. It would not benefit from the transnational creation of a new Caliphate. Indeed, a splinter faction of the Afghan Arabs including Osama bin Laden would target the Saudi state on precisely such grounds of legitimacy. And in fact the victory of the Salafists in Chechnya over the Maskhadov government but not over the Russians might have had this significant silver lining for Riyadh: that it would not result in an ultra-orthodox state that might, at some point, offer itself as a rival to Saudi Arabia in terms of religious legitimacy, the same way the Islamic State later would in 2014. In addition, since the Salafists' goals and the Saudi goal were transnational and revisionist, then Saudi geopolitical goals are best thought of not as aiming to gain control over Russian political structures like Chechnya and Dagestan, but replace them. In that sense, what country controlled the territory of Chechnya became almost less important than the growth of the human terrain upon which Salafist structures could sit – a radicalized populace throughout the North Caucasus that could inflict costs on Russia. In this, arguably, Saudi proxies succeeded spectacularly.

If the proxy link between the support of Wahhabism and geopolitical victories in Chechnya is accepted, however, there must be a full account of the costs of this support.

There was a significant additional cost to this policy. A cadet branch of al-Qaeda, fueled by the same pots of money and state institutions as the Afghan Arabs in Chechnya, launched a bombing campaign in Riyadh with major attacks in May and then November of 2003. The May bombing targeted three residential compounds, killing almost thirty people and wounding hundreds, the first in a string of dozens of terrorist attacks against the government and its enablers.[1066] This was the most significant counterterrorism challenge the state had ever faced, one that its national security agencies were initially hard-pressed to manage.

So how could this policy possibly be considered a success for Saudi Arabia when it blew back on Riyadh so heavily? In two ways. First, the sheer scale of what it had unleashed mostly on geopolitical rivals versus what it reaped at home was radically disproportionate. The al-Qaeda affiliate in Saudi Arabia was above all a counterterrorism problem, which in terms of threat to the state was manageable. Al-Qaeda's second bombing in November 2003 and subsequent bombing campaign against oil and other targets, including the US consulate in Jeddah, helped accelerate a shift in Saudi public opinion against the radicals. The Saudis launched a deradicalization effort called the National Meeting for Intellectual Dialogue that shaped the opinions of Wahhabi and other clerics. As a result of these and other efforts, senior radical clerics denounced al-Qaeda in 2004. With local militants more isolated and backing from the US, Saudi forces instituted a broad crackdown in 2005, arresting nearly a thousand people.[1067] This helped suppress the militants. Though al-Qaeda attacks continued, the group was aided by the

[1066] "Backgrounder: Al-Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula," *Council on Foreign Relations* (June 19, 2015), https://www.cfr.org/backgrounder/al-qaeda-arabian-peninsula-aqap (accessed September 12, 2020).
[1067] Hero, 199.

establishment of safe havens in Yemen after the civil war began, rather than in the Kingdom.

Most importantly, at no point during these three years was Saudi rule over the Kingdom seriously threatened, and the response to the attacks had the effect of better aligning Saudi Arabia's private Islamist institutions and pathways of support to more efficiently benefit the state. If this ledger includes the 2003 attacks in Saudi Arabia as a cost, then surely it should include, for example, the victory over the Soviets in Afghanistan as a benefit as well. Nothing is monocausal, including the Chechen war and al-Qaeda, but the Saudi promotion of Wahhabism in Muslim and borderlands alike for decades achieved significant geopolitical results next to which a counterterrorism problem – however severe – was cheap at the price. This was really the core tradeoff: tactical and operational losses for a few big strategic gains.

The second point that suggested its proxy policy was worthwhile was the international reaction, or lack of it. This was the key value about the entirety of Saudi Arabia's proxy enterprise. Unlike Iran and Russia, and to a lesser extent Pakistan, Saudi Arabia was not turned into an international pariah by its proxy warfare. There were no major or even relatively minor diplomatic consequences for Saudi Arabia during the ten-plus years in Chechnya of sponsoring Salafism; or indeed, though it is beyond the scope here, of its forty years of its jihadist proselytization. Perhaps some of this was geopolitical. The United States was the predominant power in the world during this time and Saudi Arabia was a key ally of the United States. This limited how much Russia and other victims could influence Saudi Arabia directly, in response to its proxy warfare, and also limited the costs it could inflict on the US for protecting Saudi Arabia. In a more

bipolar or multipolar world, where US opponents could wield more power and inflict more costs, Saudi sponsorship of Salafist proxies might incur more effective balancing. But then again the United States experienced terrorist attacks from Salafists of its own during the 1990's and still did little to target the Kingdom or pressure the Kingdom directly. And when discussing state sponsorship of terrorism, even after attacks in Saudi Arabia, the US often took aim at Iran and Libya, more geopolitically problematic actors though ones that presented perhaps less of a direct, imminent terrorist threat.

Even after the terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001, the US-Saudi relationship never really suffered a strategic blow. The 2003 terrorist attacks in the Kingdom actually had the strategic effect of not just improving the Kingdom's counterterrorism posture but also healing over any fissures that had emerged between the US and Saudi Arabia after 9/11. Like Pakistan later, Saudi Arabia began to look less like a perpetrator and more like a victim. This reconciliation was helped by other factors, as well, including the discovery of Iran's nuclear program which helped scuttle the Saudi-Iranian détente. But it was not just with the United States that Saudi relations warmed. Despite its assistance with Iran's Bushehr nuclear plant, Russia's relationship with Saudi Arabia also improved from 2003 onwards. Both states opposed the invasion of Iraq, and both were pleased when oil prices went up afterwards. Crown Prince Abdullah visited Moscow in 2003 and Putin made his first trip to the Kingdom in 2007.

So how did this proxy strategy work? The lack of balancing Saudi Arabia experienced during the decades of its proxy support was largely a function of a very indirect, very deniable doctrine that actively promoted private jihad and funding of radicals. In Chechnya, this model of proxy warfare delayed balancing from Russia until

early 1998 and the secular Chechen authorities until late 1998, effectively too late to save Chechnya from the radicals. It delayed any consequences for their sponsor in Riyadh until 2002, roughly a decade after Salafist influence first began expanding in the Caucasus, and then those were only short-lived. During this decade, it was clear that the Russians and the Maskhadov government had a relatively good strategic picture of the influx of Salafists into the conflict. The Maskhadov government was obviously aware tactically of the foreign fighters and foreign supporters in the midst of its fighting forces, but Maskhadov chose not to escalate the issue until late in 1998 and then only sporadically. He was trying to keep together a coalition, and in any case did not have the strength to confront the better-funded field commanders. Tactically, during the first war, Moscow may have been unable to pin down the level of Salafist influence and their external support. By 1997, however, the Russians had overcome the intelligence gap. They were certainly aware of the burgeoning extremist problem and increasingly vocal about it. The international community was at least partially aware as well, given the kidnapping epidemic and the lack of Western interest in investing in Chechnya. But the direct links to Saudi Arabia were murky, and not clearly enough delineated nor part of Saudi policy to engender a strong reaction. The links did not meet the international standard of aggression, and merited little pressure on Saudi Arabia by the Kingdom's traditional allies or even often by Russia.

The moments when Saudi Arabia's proxies did increase the amount of balancing they faced were when large groups of them crossed state lines, most clearly at Buynksk and the Khattab raid in 1999 but also at Gudermes in 1998. This effectively turned the Saudi model of proxy warfare into a much less deniable form of Chechen conventional

aggression and was treated as such by adversaries. Had the militants mirrored their subversive operations in Dagestan the same way they did in Chechnya, they might have incited less of a reaction. This was suggested by the successful takeover of Dagestani areas in May 1998 with little opposition from Moscow. It also pointed to one of several factors that affected Saudi deniability: the strength of the relatively delineated borders between Chechnya and Dagestan. The strongest Russian reaction came with Khattab's ill-fated attack across the border in 1999. His group of hundreds of armed men, coming to join an already cross-district attack by local Salafists, provoked a reaction in the way that local Salafists in Dagestan themselves did not. Those radicals had successfully created an autonomous zone organically, from the inside out, without the help of large formations of Chechens or with federal interference. Yeltsin had backed down in confronting the autonomous zones in the Dagestani villages of Karamakhi and others when they were established in 1998. When the Salafists committed aggression that violated too many norms of conventional interstate aggression, they suffered. The Saudis, however, did not.

The offensive or defensive posture of the militants less of an effect in this case, likely due to the high level of deniability the Saudi model of proxy warfare offered. Its expected advantage, after all, was that the sponsor state could project power offensively without drawing as much balancing as other models. Still, despite pursuing offensive goals for three years, balancing was slow to come. The Salafist militants who entered Chechnya during the first Chechen war when the rebels were on the defensive met little opposition from external powers or Russia. The United States, for example, was conspicuously quiet on the issue of outsiders arriving in Chechnya, even after Khattab

and others were involved in major combat operations. Russia also did not highlight foreign influence in the first war. Its desire to downplay the conflict owed in part to Yeltsin's political fortunes, but that was also partly the result of the fact that Russia was clearly viewed as the aggressor in the first war and faced crushing international criticism as a result. Then, during the period of independence, the Salafists successfully forced the government to accept their domestic aims, such as sharia law, without incurring significant external balancing or much internal balancing from Maskhadov. Until 2001 and 2002, in fact, by far the bulk of the international condemnation was on Russia's balancing actions, not on the protagonists. The only significant international balancing against the Salafists and Saudi Arabia's links to radical Islamic institutions came after 2001, when the Chechen militants were clearly in a defensive role. This suggested the more remotely a proxy is connected to the sponsor, the more offensive goals it can pursue effectively.

It was also indicative that the increase in Salafist influence domestically came after the Chechen republic's first president Dzhokhar Dudayev was replaced by his successor, Aslan Maskhadov. Certainly, Maskhadov was a weak leader. His repeated and ineffectual attempts at conciliation with the radicals and inability to provide security revealed a weak base of power himself. But there was also an uncertainty about his regime that helped prevent him from enjoying the same perks of international sovereignty that other states enjoyed. His failure to win clear international recognition from any other state was telling, despite his efforts in the West. Western countries offered him little tangible support against either his Salafist rivals or against the Russians once the second war began, particularly compared to Dudayev's government and the first war in 1994.

And this was true besides his actions on domestic items like Islamic law or ambivalent independence arrangements with Russia being not too dissimilar from Dudayev's.

Did the involvement of Salafists in other wars affect Saudi culpability in Chechnya? The Islamic institutions that supported militants in Chechnya also supported them in places like Dagestan and elsewhere. This was a feature of the Saudi model, not a bug. Support specifically to Chechnya could rise or fall depending on the attraction or necessity of the conflict to the Saudi state, the Saudi public, and the broader Salafist community. There were charitable foundations that were created specifically for Chechnya, and others that were repurposed. But other Saudi foundations, and certainly the body of the fighters who came out of the Afghan war were also involved in places as far afield as Tajikistan, Algeria, and Bosnia – and the United States, for that matter. This may have helped normalize the involvement of them and other Saudi proxies in the Caucasus, and contributed to Yeltsin's reluctance to make addressing it a feature of his Chechen policy. It also may have normalized the seizure of Karamakhi and other Dagestani villages by Wahhabis in 1998: after all, this was a phenomenon to which Russia was used. However, broadly, the impact of these other conflicts involving the Afghan Arabs and the spillover of financing from Saudi Arabia might not have been to decrease the pushback against violations of sovereignty, but to saddle the Chechen Salafists with the transgressions of the US-based Salafists like al-Qaeda. In fact, it might even be appropriate to suggest that al-Qaeda's attacks on November 11, 2001 themselves indicate that the Afghan Arabs and their Salafist movement as a group themselves were still offensive in 2001 – after all, they were choosing new targets – and thus that reduced Saudi deniability catastrophically.

The brief Russian-Chechen peace treaty signed in 1997 may also have aided Saudi deniability by neither recognizing Chechnya as an independent state nor clarifying its position within the Russian Federation. It certainly hurt the ability of both Maskhadov and Moscow to resist Salafist influence. Chechnya's unclear status hamstrung Maskhadov's efforts to gain support from the West. Even until deep in the second war, Western countries and organizations like the Parliamentary Committee for Europe (PACE) would leaven their criticism of human rights abuses caused by Russian actions against the Chechens with declarations of support for Russia's territorial integrity.[1068] That lessened the impact of Russia's violations of human rights standards (and thus some of the benefit of Maskhadov's Western orientation) and all but excluded the possibility of Maskhadov receiving conventional interstate support. The ambiguous treaty also precluded for Moscow the use of Russian forces against the growing Salafist problem by keeping its troops out of Chechnya – until 1999, of course, when the entire question became moot. Though there was no clear codification of Saudi influence in the country like in Georgia and Ukraine, where diplomatic arrangements increased Russian deniability, this may parenthetically have actually increased Saudi deniability. Including the Kingdom might have had the reverse effect and decreased Saudi deniability to an unacceptable degree. It would have presumed Saudi control over or involvement with the actors. That was a suggestion Saudi officials would certainly like to avoid, and did.

They did in Chechnya and elsewhere, besides, right up until the events of September 11, 2001. It is something of a cop-out to hold up 9/11 as an exogenous shock

[1068] Thomas Grant, "Current Development: Afghanistan Recognizes Chechnya," *American University International Law Review* 15, issue 4 (2000): 872, http://digitalcommons.wcl.american.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1276&context=auilr (accessed December 4, 2017).

but-for-which the Saudi proxy warfare on the battlefield would have been more successful. And yet it is quite true that Russia had little ability to affect Saudi sponsorship of the Salafists until after those attacks. None of its operations on the ground or diplomatic outreach led to a serious multilateral action against said funding, nor was Russia able to leverage Saudi Arabia successfully to reduce its ties to Chechnya or support to private institutions. Nor is it clear that it ever successfully urged the United States to do so as well. There is no reason to believe, therefore, that without said shift in the international strategic landscape, the battlefield outcome of the Salafists versus the Russians from 2001-2003 would not have been far closer to that of the first war, whatever Moscow's initial victories. After all, Russia conquered Grozny during the second war in about the same time period as it conquered Grozny during the first. And the rebels would likely have had far more robust external support without 9/11 than they did with it. The Salafist control of the government and their spoiling actions on the ground (like Barayev's kidnapping of the British engineers) obviated the possibility of Western support, but there was a very real possibility of replacing it with support from radical Salafist movements, particularly the Taliban, and other Islamic states including perhaps increased Saudi support. As it happened, when Salafist support became anathema after 9/11, those avenues of assistance dried up as well. That was not the only effect. The US-led invasion of Iraq, which may well have not happened without 9/11, likely also hurt the Salafists' battlefield capability in Chechnya by drawing off much of the attention and resources of militant communities in the Arab world. Before Iraq, before Afghanistan, the Chechen separatists had more than a whiff of the mujahedin from 1980, heir to the landmark victorious battle against the Soviet Union. But after September 11th there was a

real Afghanistan – and even more alluring, a real Iraq, closer and more habitable for foreign fighters and Salafist networks to support.

CHAPTER SEVEN: SUMMARY AND IMPLICATIONS

This dissertation began with the question of how states were most effectively using proxy warfare. In response it proposed three linkages. First, that the plausible deniability of a sponsor's support to its proxy was inversely related to the amount of that support – and not just the thousand different iterations of support, from weaponry to training to recruitment, but also to control. The more closely a sponsor had to control a proxy's goals and decision-making, the less deniable was its relationship with that proxy. Second, all things being equal, a sponsor's support boosted a proxy's operational capabilities on the battlefield. A proxy receiving fifty machine guns and fifty million dollars per month should be less capable than the exact same proxy with one hundred machine guns and one hundred million dollars per month. A sponsor's deniability, therefore was inversely related to a proxy's operational capability. And the third key point – the answer to the motivating question here – was that this tradeoff of deniability for capability was an overall net loss to the effectiveness of the sponsor's proxy warfare and the success of its strategic goals.

To illustrate and test this hypothesis, it examined five instances of proxy warfare by four powers: Russia, Iran, Pakistan, and Saudi Arabia. In all five cases examined here, the moments when deniability slipped were the ones when the sponsor incurred strategic consequences. More direct, active support and control of proxies reduced sponsor deniability, usually for the worse. The strategic costs in those instances were greater than the operational gains achieved by such support, though the battlefield outcomes were often more complicated.

To frame its analysis of the benefits of proxy warfare, this dissertation took up the basic reasons states used proxies: their lower cost, their ideological benefit, and their

strategic benefit. Proxies were often cheaper in terms of domestic political and financial cost than were conventional forces. The United States could support a robust Kurdish militia group to preserve its interests in Syria without committing a large number of its forces. Proxies could also provide ideological validation for the regime sponsoring them, as with Saudi Arabia, or the proxies themselves, as with Hezbollah. This phenomenon is further apparent among the myriad Sunni extremist groups franchising themselves under whichever group is most powerful at the moment, from the Islamic State of Iraq and al-Sham (ISIS) to al-Qaeda.

The analysis here has focused on the third reason states use proxies: for the strategic benefits they offer. Of these, the main one is plausible deniability. How is deniability defined? Traditionally, plausible deniability meant the degree to which a state can plausibly assert to other states it is not responsible for a given act – here, the act of intervention in a conflict through support or control of a proxy. This was true even if (and especially if) the deniable action was assumed to involve them – for example, an airstrike in Pakistan for which the United States was assumed to be responsible even if it did not claim responsibility. Or if heavy weapons were carried into eastern Ukraine by unmarked trucks: that was also plausible deniability. Or if large sums of money somehow made their way from state coffers to jihadist institutions and then to Islamist militants, who themselves acted, in places, in pursuance of interests that were generally the state's. Of course, these three scenarios involve different levels of deniability, and this dissertation has posited that they each had correspondingly different strategic effects, not just in the first order effect of how materiel travelled from the sponsor to the proxy but what kind of reaction it incurred from other states.

This reaction is the core of what this dissertation measured, and it was challenging. It has attempted to measure the period between when a state should have reacted to aggression and when it actually did react, if at all. The baseline metric of aggression it used – its ideal type of interstate warfare – was aggression by conventional forces. It implicitly posited that if one state invaded another using conventional forces with no other mitigating effects, there would have been a balancing action by other members of the international community. This could be an elusive concept: it was like an error, in baseball, because it was essentially normative. It suggested something that should have been done, and measured what was done against that benchmark. To mitigate some of this normative ambiguity, it looked particularly closely at when the support or relationship of sponsor to proxy changed. It identified those moments when the level of deniability increased or decreased, and looked for a correlating strategic reaction from opponents. This was a way to tease causality out of complex examples.

This is at its core an agnostic dissertation with regard to why states balance other states. It takes no position on whether they do so: because, for example, the increasingly normative strength of territorial boundaries and prohibition against interstate war, or because of the self-interest of great powers and other states, or because of the blossoming flower of international democratic ideals. Some of these arguments were surveyed in the literature review earlier, but for the purposes here the argument relies on the assumption that they do balance interstate aggression. Interstate aggression is heavily punished heavily by other states in the international community. The strategic benefit a state receives from proxy warfare, at its core, is some diminution of that balancing, whatever

level its base level due to the myriad complicating factors involved. This diminution is due to plausible deniability of the support method employed.

In the results of these cases, deniability offered three types of delay. The first was obfuscation of what is happening and the second was the provision of an excuse not to act. Deniability could help a state hide its involvement in a conflict to a greater or lesser degree. While it was not immediately obvious that Pakistan was actively supporting the Afghan Taliban from 2002-2004, by 2006 and certainly 2007 the picture had become clearer. However, this was a comparatively minor effect. In all five of the cases here, there was early suspicion, sometimes confirmed, that the proxies involved were agents of their respective sponsor. In the earliest days of Hezbollah, for example, emissaries would travel to revolutionary Iran to ask that kidnapped Westerners be freed. When militants appeared in eastern Ukrainian cities, suspicion immediately fell on the Russian government that had inserted unmarked soldiers into Crimea only weeks before. To a certain degree the rapidity of confirmation of these links is exogenous, a function of states' military and intelligence budgets. Intelligence is available to governments that invest in it, and it allows national policymakers to come to conclusions about proxy support and act accordingly. But the alignment of objectives between proxies and their presumed sponsors provides a strong starting point when looking for a sponsor. Of course, the degree of overlap between the objectives of proxy and sponsor has an effect on this element of a sponsor's deniability. The more disparate the two entities' objectives, the more challenging it was for sponsors to cut through a state's obfuscation to the question of intent. This was helpful for both Pakistan and especially Saudi Arabia in delaying the counterbalancing. Opposing states had to sift through the intelligence to

determine how much control each state really had on their relative militant groups, even as Pakistan and Saudi Arabia themselves were coming under attack. How much they were perpetrators, in other words, and how much they were victims.

The second type of delay came from the balancer's inability to prove to the international community the link between the sponsor and proxy. Not just the link, either, but the inability to argue that the proxy sponsorship in question constituted a form of interstate aggression. Understanding that a state is intervening in another to support a proxy and convincing allies, partners, and adversaries of the same thing are very different proposals. Many of the information sources are classified, and require downgrading sensitive intelligence to pass to different tiers of partners. By the time such information travels beyond the very closest allies, it tends to become degraded into mush. Deploying this information effectively at international organizations also can be challenging. Mistakes, like Secretary of State Colin Powell's speech to the Security Council in 2003 on Iraq, can haunt a nation for decades and add fuel to those states that want not to believe. It is certainly not the case that any great power needs approval or acceptance from the UN or other multilateral institutions (or even allied states) to balance aggressors or intervene in third countries. But not having multilateral consensus raises the cost for unilateral action, both in material and in political terms.

There are, of course, different tiers of consensus. There is a difference between a state like Germany, which when confronted by US demands to help it punish proxy aggression will demand legally enforceable evidence, and Russia, which unless directly confronted and backed into a corner will refuse to see what is under its national face. The two states have different interests and different levels of alignment with US interests.

But it is not usually necessary or feasible to convince this last group of states. A proxy sponsor's allies, obviously, will fight tooth and nail against sanctioning their own proxies or their allied sponsors. This type of delay, then, is mostly relevant to treaty allies and international partners that would join in a balancing effort even if they were not bound by treaty to do so. Germany's actions in sanctioning Russia and the Ukrainian separatists were one example of this. So were other European states' reluctance to sanction Hezbollah and Iran until the former's entrance into the Syrian civil war. The participation in balancing of these middle-of-of-the-road states is valuable. They mitigate the unilateral cost of balancing, but also critically provide the ability to impose much greater non-military costs that might be able to obviate the need to intervene militarily at all.

Both the inability to prove aggression nor the ability to fully understand proxy-sponsor links did not prevent sponsors from suffering reputational damage among both balancers and middle-of-the-road states. This reputational damage affected how quick potential balancers were to act over a period of time and sequence of proxy actions. The European reaction to Russian proxy sponsorship in Ukraine was quicker, all things considered, than its reaction to Russia's actions in Georgia. Saudi Arabia did not really suffer determinative reputational damage for its sponsorship of jihadist proxies until the terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001, even though its sponsorship mechanisms had not significantly changed since the 1970's and 1980's. Iran, by contrast, suffered significant reputational damage from its closer control and sponsorship of Hezbollah. There was little doubt in any potential opposing states, and even most neutral parties, that Iranian leaders were in control of Hezbollah's strategic decisions. Suspicion from prior proxy

sponsorship, even if improvable, could bleed over to cast suspicion even if hard intelligence is lacking. Pakistan obviously had deep ties to the Taliban and a long history of proxy sponsorship, though it was able to defer determinative US blame until about 2007-2008, a period when the Haqqani network began its high-profile bombings (along with, of course, other indicators the Afghan campaign was going poorly). And ideology affected reputation. A state like Iran with a revolutionary ideology based on millenarian Shiism faced more suspicion when revolutionary Shia movements broke out elsewhere than a state without such an ideology, like many liberal democracies. It should be said, however, that Russia and others also viewed democratic movements and many civil society groups with suspicion and publicly accused them of Western support. This could itself be affected by how vocal states are about wanting to change existing regimes to make them more democratic. There was a significant difference between the Russian reaction to the Rose Revolution in Georgia, which also seemed to have caught the West by surprise, and the toppling of Ukrainian President Yanukovych in 2014, which did, to say the least, not.

The third and primary strategic benefit of deniability was to manage escalation: that is, both the aggressor and the balancer could pretend a confrontation did not exist. This benefit had nothing to do with accurate intelligence about proxy sponsorship and only a limited amount to do with the balancer's ability to prove such sponsorship to other states. Preventing escalation, in fact, relied on both sides knowing what was being done and operating within tacit constraints. Preventing escalation came from a desire to limit domestic cost, certainly. But the plausible deniability in proxy warfare also allowed the sponsor to set the strategic constraints by which they preferred to try and fight. In eastern

Ukraine, Russia experimented with several levels of intervention between May and August of 2014 and January to February of 2015. It changed these both when it experienced significant balancing, as after the MH17 attack, or more definitively when it was losing on the battlefield. Pakistan's entire strategy in Afghanistan was based around keeping the so-called pot warm, but not boiling – that is, not inciting a direct confrontation with the United States. This type of delay is of course not unique to proxy warfare. Indeed, it encompasses an entire sub-genre of international relations literature largely spurred by the introduction of nuclear weapons into strategy during the Cold War.

The causal mechanism was not so clear-cut, however. There are, of course, many other reasons for the delay between when a state should, conceivably, have responded to aggression and when it finally did. Many of these are exogenous reasons, or potential reasons, such as Pakistan's control over the main supply corridor to international forces in Afghanistan. But other factors are similar. Most of these include factors that affect the strength of interstate borders and of a state's sovereignty, which help determine how hard an aggressor will be punished. Transgression of a clearly demarcated, established line, like the Franco-German border, should meet a far more immediate and severe response than a disputed one, like the Indo-Chinese border. Of course: all other things being equal, which they never are.

In some of the cases here, the consequences of proxy warfare and the deniability of sponsors was profoundly decreased or increased by several additional factors, many of which affected the strength of interstate borders. An overriding theme was that sovereignty was cumulative: different elements that affect a state's sovereignty also affected a foreign sponsor's deniability in projecting power. This is because the signature

transgression of interstate warfare (or intrastate warfare involving outside parties) is the projection of military power across state lines. The transgression of these interstate borders is one of the actions that will most readily mobilize international opposition and strategic consequences. Since the prime value of proxy warfare is to mitigate and delay that opposition, elements that weaken the sanctity of interstate borders should and do allow less deniable support to proxies without incurring the same degree of consequences. In the cases here these elements are several.

First, diversity breeds conflict. The more ethnically and geographically intermingled conflict lines were, the more effectively a sponsor could project power. Intermingled lines of control permitted easier conduct of violence, which increased the deniability of sponsors supporting that violence. A relatively high level of constant violence meant that balancing would be slower against spikes in that violence because they would be more difficult to differentiate. Both Georgia and Ukraine were strong examples of this effect. In Georgia, the near-daily violence in July and August 2008 between ethnic Ossetian and ethnic Georgian villages slowed the Western balancing against Russia's increasing pressure on Tbilisi. In Ukraine, a line of control that cut through built-up, ethnically mixed areas and the level of conflict that was sustained from December 2014 to January 2015 similarly helped delay balancing. The ease of inciting violence in these areas meant that sustaining violence and thus heightening deniability was very cheap. Where ethnic Georgians and Ossetians lived side-by-side, individual snipers or mortar teams could spark an incident, raising the threshold for identifying an intensification of conflict and thus Russian aggression. Comparatively, in Lebanon after 2000, it cost more for Hezbollah to conduct military operations across a clearly-defined

border. Such operations had to be more complex and higher-profile, often involving more advanced weapons, inciting a greater reaction against both it and Iran.

Second, war begets war. Proxy wars in one area make related wars less costly for aggressors. The most obvious example of this was in Lebanon, where Hezbollah used its proxy war with Israel to reduce international opposition to Iran's military support, which then allowed it to retain its dominance over other domestic factions. Clear examples also come from Georgia, where Russia's war in Chechnya clouded territorial sovereignty along the Pankisi Gorge and helped mitigate potential balancing to its extraterritorial power projection. In addition, Saudi Arabia's sponsorship of militant Salafists in Dagestan made its power projection in Chechnya more deniable and thus more effective. It seemed less geostrategic to either the Russians or the secular Chechens, and more a cultural phenomenon, against which it was more difficult to balance. In Afghanistan, the TTP's war against Pakistan and Kabul's alleged tolerance of TTP safe havens enabled Islamabad's deniability for its own sponsorship of the Haqqani network and other militants in the other direction. For the proxy sponsor, in other words, the more the better.

Third, diplomatic mechanisms created to defuse conflicts almost always did long-term harm to stability if they blurred state lines of sovereignty, even if that was the short-term cost of peace. In such cases they served to increase deniability of sponsor countries. The more the sponsor country was linked by such a mechanism with the target country, especially if it codified its ability to keep its own or proxy forces in the target country, the less balancing against its own influence occurred. The mechanism appeared to legitimize the sponsor country's presence and influence in the target country, and thus reduce

balancing efforts. While conflict was ongoing, diplomatic processes seem to have had a numbing effect on rival external powers, reducing their willingness to take action against the sponsor country. This was certainly true in the Georgia, Ukraine, and Lebanon cases. The most glaring examples of this were after the 2014 Minsk agreement in Ukraine, when international balancing essentially stopped and Russia's aggression continued, and the Joint Peacekeeping Control Commission in Georgia, which legitimized the presence of Russian forces on Georgian soil. Of course, there is a natural balance here. Some of these diplomatic arrangements were an effort to halt ongoing aggression, and thus the risk of no agreement might have been greater than imposing a flawed one. But the point is that the costs were higher than they appeared; balancing was how stable diplomatic arrangements arise, rather than diplomatic arrangements leading to balancing.

Fourth, new governments have more corroded rights compared to existing regimes. A change in regime of the target state generally increased the deniability of proxy sponsors by reducing the balancing against their power projection. This was due to the fact that upending the status quo seemed to reduce the penalties for outside powers to aggressively expand their influence in a target state. Once a state's foreign policy orientation was changing, there was far less balancing against a different state to try and change it back. This was most clearly the case in Georgia and (to a lesser extent) Ukraine, where newly installed pro-Western leaders were faced with aggressive action by Russian proxies and struggled to garner external support. It was also particularly the case in Chechnya, where Maskhadov received little external support against the Salafists after independence or for his increasingly more Islamist government against the Russians in the second war.

Fifth, the strategic posture of a proxy mattered. In all five cases, the sponsor's deniability of its proxy warfare was reduced when its proxies were used for offensive purposes, especially with a close proxy-sponsor relationship. The effect was the strongest in Georgia, where the separatists enjoyed one of the closest relationships with their sponsor. Russian infusions of various kinds of support after an aggressive Georgian move always incurred less balancing than without one. It was weakest in Chechnya, where it was still visible when the influx of Salafist support during the first Chechen war incurred little balancing compared to later cross-border attacks into Russia. This more remote linkage may have been due to the increased distance between proxy and sponsor, since it was also somewhat weak in Pakistan. This makes intuitive sense: the more an agent is supported by its sponsor, the more the agent's actions are viewed in light of its sponsor's goals. But because most proxy-sponsor relationships are closer than that of the Saudis, such proxies are usually more effective on defense, when they incur comparatively less balancing but still retain a baseline policy victory (as in Ukraine). Conversely, more deniable relationships are more effective on offense.

Case Results

One important distinction should be noted in the results. Most of the consequences for proxy sponsorship came at the strategic level. At the operational level, a closer sponsor-proxy relationship was sometimes better militarily. It was tactically more effective to have more involvement of a state's armed forces, more supplies, and tighter control over proxies during a battle or a campaign. But it usually came out in the wash. By using national armed forces, by exerting more direct control, a state in the

medium- to longer-run lost the benefit of using a proxy, even if – as in Georgia – many factors mitigated against a strong international response to fairly conventional interstate aggression. Russia's use of proxies was operationally successful in Georgia and Ukraine. But one was tempted to say: so what? Conventional operations against both states could also be successful, and were. But the strategic costs Russia incurred, particularly against Ukraine in 2015, made its use of proxy warfare almost irrelevant. Comparatively, Saudi Arabia might have had very little influence on the Afghan Arabs, with significant consequences later on, but that helped very much deflect accusations of Saudi culpability for Islamist uprisings in places like Tajikistan and Chechnya. When the amount of policy utility for Riyadh that these militant groups achieved is measured against the materiel and strategic cost they incurred, even including the odd bombing in Riyadh…well, the return on investment did not look too bad.

Case One: Russia and Georgia

The conflict between Russia and Georgia in August 2008 was the first time that the modern European order had been broken by interstate war. When it was over, Russia's key operational goals seemed to have been accomplished. South Ossetia and Abkhazia had slipped further beyond Georgia's control, their territories reinforced by thousands of Russian troops and the moral and legal question about their status muddled. Strategically, too, Georgia's ambitions for joining the EU and NATO remained halted, and a strong deterrent signal was sent to like-minded states in Russia's near abroad that might stray. Russia also escaped punishment from the US and Europeans despite having invaded its neighbor, though the August War may have contributed to a balancing effort

among the NATO border states. Even so, the war's outcome was more mixed than first appeared. NATO membership had not been eliminated by the war: indeed, French and German doubts and opposition to such a move had existed long before August 2008. The United States quickly followed the war with a $1 billion aid package, a new strategic framework agreement, as well as visits by senior members of the outgoing and incoming administration. There was a crest building, which was partially cut short by the Obama administration's declared "reset" policy with Russia – which, if anything, meant absolving Moscow of the consequences for its actions.

The key tool for Russia in this conflict were Abkhazian and especially South Ossetian proxies, which were closely supported by Moscow. Their institutions were dominated by Russian soldiers, Russian money, and Russian politics. Russian troops had been stationed in Abkhazia and South Ossetia since the early 1990's. When the president of South Ossetia Ludvig Chibirov was replaced by the complaint Eduard Kokoity in February 2001, South Ossetia's policy became Putin's policy. Even though Russian peacekeeping troops were already on the ground in Tskhinvali as part of the 1992 ceasefire agreement, Russian officers also commanded many of the security institutions of the South Ossetian government. By 2008, these included its Minister of Internal Affairs, its intelligence service, its National Security Council, and its Ministry of Defense. Moscow provided heavy weaponry to the separatists, such as seventy-five T-72 tanks in June 2004, and provided training to South Ossetian troops and cadet officers at its military academy in North Ossetia. Volunteer fighters from across Russia were also encouraged to join the separatists in their cause.

How, despite very direct Russian support for the South Ossetians, did its war succeed? In this case, Russia conducted an effective proxy war not by disguising its support of its proxies or reducing it, but by eroding the threshold of conflict such that its operations in Georgia did not incur the same cost similar actions and conventional aggression would elsewhere. It blurred the line between peace and war by gradually increasing combat incidents conducted by its proxy. When Georgia responded with its own conventional forces, which by definition had little deniability, it incurred significant costs internationally. There were also several factors that increased Moscow's deniability. First, the two main periods when Russia increased its support for its proxies came when it was on the defensive, from 1991 to 1992 and then from mid-2004 to early 2006. It thus seemed reactive, rather than aggressive. Once the materiel was in country, of course, it could be used for whatever Moscow's goals were. The biggest initiators of external balancing came when Russia attempted to change the region's formal political status, rather than achieve de facto change on the ground. The two main examples of this came during South Ossetia's vote for independence and Russia's establishment of formal relations with the breakaway areas. Russia's military deniability, in other words, was far greater than its political deniability.

Diplomatically, the Joint Control Commission was a valuable enabling mechanism to legitimize the presence of Russian forces in South Ossetia. Once some Russian forces were stationed in Georgia, accountability for them blurred, increasing Russian deniability. The intermixing of Georgian and Russian villages also assisted Russia in raising the threshold of conflict. Because it was so easy to initiate violence in such areas, increases in the intensity of local conflict were not immediately recognized,

increasing Russian deniability when it was on offense and delaying the international reaction. The newness and reorientation of Georgia's government also increased Russian deniability. Because the strategic status quo was already changing, the balancing that aggressive Russian movements and increases in its support for its proxies might have incurred was lessened. The leaders of important external powers viewed Saakashvili as unreliable and a hothead which allowed Russia to successfully shift the blame for aggression when war came. Lastly, the spillover of the second Chechen war into Georgia helped normalize Russia's power projection across the frontier. As Chechen terrorism became more violent, Russia's cross-border military action became more normalized, and thus its deniability increased.

Case Two: Russia and Ukraine

Russia's style of proxy warfare varied significantly in the Ukraine example, but on average the state gave a high degree of support to its proxies including committing its own troops at key intervals. When its deniability slipped at these and other moments, the price Russia paid for its war rose. Whether these costs were worth it – whether this case was a success for Russia or not – depended on a cost-benefit analysis of the goals being sought. Moscow did retain control of the naval base in Crimea and fractured Ukraine, where under the Steinmeier diplomatic formula Russia could retain troops essentially indefinitely. The result was an ambiguous entity in its east that could mitigate the costs of future Russian military pressure against Kiev. Russia's actions also probably increased the pressure against additional eastern European countries joining NATO. But Russia abandoned the idea of a broader Donbas state on its border. This was far from

what many of the separatist leadership had hoped for, which was independence or annexation. Due to the control Russia exerted over the rebels, particularly later in the conflict, when disagreements over goals arose Moscow showed little compunction about bringing separatist goals in line with its own.

Moscow paid heavily for these gains, however. It suffered from multiple rounds of sanctions, including sectoral sanctions that were the most severe since the end of the Cold War. It also incited a NATO military deployment on its border, which arrived in 2016 with Enhanced Forward Presence. Its actions effected a total reversal of the Obama Administration's policy towards Russia, which had attempted to improve the bilateral relationship throughout its first five years. The key judgment here was that these costs were worth it in the first portion of the war, during the summer of 2014, when Russia achieved most of its goals. In the second portion, from January to February 2014, they were not worth it, as Russia incurred strategic costs for only tactical gains.

Russia's relationship with its Ukrainian proxies was the second-closest of the five cases reviewed here. This was partly a function of the speed by which events transpired: after Viktor Yanukovych's overthrow, the Russian government had to create a proxy military organization from scratch. In Crimea, barely-disguised Russian troops took control of the area's government buildings with a thin fiction of proxy participation. In Donbas, Moscow had more time and could establish more deniability, but only slightly. The men it selected to lead this insurgency were mostly Russian military and intelligence officers themselves. They included Igor Bezler, commander of a militia unit near Luhansk; Alexander Borodai, who was prime minister in Donetsk; and Igor Strelkov, who was the separatists' overall military commander for several months. Russia supplied

heavy weapons to the rebels, such as the Buk-M1 air defense system, which shot down flight MH17 in July 2014. Most importantly, however, Russian forces themselves directly intervened in the conflict, both in terms of specialists (particularly after the MH17 disaster) and combat troops who were deployed when the separatists' fortunes were at their lowest. These were times when Russian deniability slipped the most and incurred the highest degree of balancing.

These strategic balancing instances came in four tranches of increasingly heavy sanctions. The first round was applied after Russia annexed Crimea, an action that was conducted with essentially no deniability that almost precluded the need for proxies at all. The second came after the downing of MH17. The third set of sanctions was applied in August, after the first major intervention of Russian troops in eastern Ukraine. An estimated 1,000 Russian troops crossed the border to help separatist forces claw back many of the gains Kiev had made since June. This intervention was strategically worthwhile, however, as it probably saved the rebel enclave from being cut off after the success of Kiev's summer offensive in reclaiming separatist territory. The fourth was applied in a similarly decisive instance, when Russian troops entered the battle at critical moments at places like Debaltseve and Mariupol to advance the rebels' winter offensive and seize territory when their proxies stalled. Each of these balancing actions came after particularly direct Russian support, except for the MH17 attack. In that instance as well, however, Russian-made weapons were a key identifier of blame.

In general, Moscow faced more rapid balancing when it used proxies on offense, which helped make the second period of fighting more costly than the first. This was particularly evident during the separatists' winter operations in late January 2015, when

US Secretary of State John Kerry and other American officials were quicker to condemn Russian support as the extent of the proxy offensive became clear. The US and other external balancers had been much slower to balance Russian support for the separatists – particularly the supply of heavy weapons into Ukraine – during the summer of 2014.

Russia achieved significant deniability at two points, in April 2014 and September 2014. The US and EU, which had been quick to push back against the Crimean annexation, essentially reset their balancing level to zero when the Donbas unrest started almost immediately thereafter. After the Minsk I agreement in September, violence remained high but US and EU pressure ratcheted down. The Minsk process sapped Western balancing, as well as muddied the lines of sovereignty, both adding to Russia's deniability and ability to delay external consequences. It siphoned off key US and European pressure on Russia, particularly in 2015, when Russia took advantage of the West's focus on Minsk II from February 6 onward to push its offensive further. US and European officials muted their pubic comments about Russian culpability during the negotiations. Worse, the resulting Minsk processes and the sequencing of events they mandated permitted Russian troops to stay more or less indefinitely. The deep intermixing of ethnicities along the line of control also helped increase Russian deniability. In areas like Donetsk, the front line cut through built up civilian areas like the airport and villages that were essentially collocated. The ease of inciting violence and sustaining a high level of conflict even during ceasefire periods through artillery and other fire made it harder for external balancers to identify territorial aggression and summon themselves to respond. This was particularly true during the rise in violence in 2015 that heralded the start of Russia's second offensive.

Lastly, as in Georgia, the change in Ukraine's government offered more deniability for Russian proxy support. Even though the separatist leadership had clear ties to Moscow, the abruptness of Ukraine's political change and the destabilizing of the status quo lent some credibility to their claims of self-determination, and thus deniability to Russian support. The West quickly responded to Crimea, but then afterwards almost immediately began to offer (or demand) fundamental changes in the sovereignty of Ukraine and the political status of the east. The political changeover in the regime seems to have been unconventional enough to call into question the basic formula of sovereignty of the country. The higher proportion of ethnic Russians in Ukraine's east was identified and by all sides, including the West, as a measure of legitimacy for the new government that to a certain extent would permit Russian meddling.

Case Three: Iran and Lebanon

Iran's use of Hezbollah as a proxy to project power against Israel and other groups in Lebanon was overwhelmingly successful, at least until Hezbollah's entry into the Syrian civil war. Iran did achieve its goals in Syria. In the process, however, it incurred major strategic costs. By 2017, it was isolated in the region. Its policies had sparked the creation of a major Sunni military alliance and unprecedented balancing action by opposing regional powers, restoring the pro-Hariri international coalition that had collapsed after the July war. However, these strategic costs were somewhat mitigated by the exogenous American decision to pursue a nuclear accord with Iran, which coincided with scaling back American opposition to Iranian regional influence in Syria. This policy dampened the balancing that Hezbollah's deployment incurred: it was a result of the Obama Administration's larger strategic desire pursue a nuclear accord and

implied regional accommodation with Iran. Even while its footprint in the region increased, it was being reintegrated into the global financial system and reviving its economy. Even so, this would be reversed by the Trump Administration, in no small part due to its activities in Syria.

For its part, Hezbollah was hurt by its deployment to Syria. It did maintain an important supply route and patron. But that deployment shattered its national legitimacy, both domestically and more importantly internationally. The designation of Hezbollah's military wing as a terrorist organization by two key entities – the EU and Saudi Arabia – was an indicator of the increased ease of balancing against the group. With its external combat deployment, it was more clearly an agent of power projection by the Iranians and more clearly an instrument of interstate war. Moreover, by 2016, it had suffered significantly at the hands of the Syrian rebels. Out of an estimated 6,000-8,000 of its fighters present in Syria, it had absorbed 700-1,000 casualties.[1069] Internal balancing came from Sunni militant strikes against Hezbollah targets, Iranian personnel, and Shia communities.

Created in 1982 as a proxy for revolutionary Iran in Lebanon, Hezbollah eventually established its dominance among the Shia community and then in Lebanon itself. The support Hezbollah received from Iran was full-spectrum and massive. Iranian officials and the militia itself have described the Islamic Republic as the spiritual and political guide to Hezbollah. Iranian forces have been present in Lebanon's Beqaa Valley to support Hezbollah since its founding and prompted all of the group's major strategic decisions. Iran supplied a wide variety of weapons, such as explosives and automatic

[1069] Dan De Luce, "Syrian war takes rising toll on Hezbollah," *Foreign Policy* (July 9, 2015), http://foreign-policy.com/2015/07/09/syrian-war-takes-rising-toll-on-hezbollah (accessed October 20, 2015).

rifles, and later long-range missiles, anti-ship weapons, and aerial drones. Tehran also subsidized Hezbollah with hundreds of millions of dollars annually. This support was complemented by that of Iran's ally, Syria, which until 2005 maintained tens of thousands of troops in Lebanon. However, despite this support, the group experienced long periods without facing major external opposition to its own power projection or Iran's support.

The key element allowing Iran to achieve significant deniability despite its heavy footprint in Lebanon was its related proxy war with Israel. Throughout its existence, Hezbollah was fighting two wars simultaneously: one against Israel and one against other Lebanese factions to maintain its weapons and thus Lebanon's strategic orientation. This first conflict enabled a high degree of Iranian support for Hezbollah, including the presence of IRGC forces on Iranian territory, while mitigating external balancing. This effect was magnified by the domestic legitimacy Hezbollah cultivated, which fed its mantle of being a national resistance. Hezbollah built this legitimacy by rooting itself organically in the population. This included providing an extensive array of social services to the Lebanese public, creating a political party, and joining the national government. That legitimacy did not necessarily reduce internal balancing from sectarian rivals, but it did increase the operational assets available to Hezbollah through the national government and most critically split potential external balancers of Iran. These included Sunni Arab states, the US, and the European Union, the aims of which diverged when Hezbollah could credibly claim it was acting on behalf of Lebanon's national defense. That shattered their unity and their support to other Lebanese political factions. This effect was diminished when Hezbollah pursued goals that were too explicitly linked

to Iranian or Syrian causes, which reduced the deniability of Iranian and Syrian involvement. This united external powers against Iranian influence. Key examples of this were the murder of Rafiq Hariri and Hezbollah's deployment in Syria. The Hariri tribunal was a dire threat to Iran's presence in Lebanon, not because the Lebanese did not know who killed Hariri – certainly, they did – but because it took aim at Hezbollah's domestic legitimacy that internationally imperiled the deniability of Iran's presence and support.

A key difference between Russia's use of proxies and Iran's was that Hezbollah had significant tactical independence. This was necessary, since Hezbollah – and not Russian forces, as in Georgia – was intended to be the primary agent of Iran's influence. Other factors also affected the deniability of Iranian support and thus the effectiveness of Hezbollah. Sponsor goals and the balancing their policies incurred were closely linked at times like 2013, when more aggressive Iranian policies were matched by increased balancing. As the border between Israel and Hezbollah became more demarcated, and the contact points between the two sides increased, Hezbollah had to use more advanced weapons to conduct military operations. These weapons and complex attacks attracted more attention to the state support Hezbollah received, and thus served to reduce Iran's deniability. Further, the diplomatic mechanism that formed the core of modern Lebanon's relationship external powers was flawed, also serving to increase Iran's deniability. Because the Taif Accord demanded the disarmament of Hezbollah without the ability to enforce it, a precedent was set which reduced the ability of external powers to react to such a violation of other agreements later. In subsequent resolutions, the

continued violation by Hezbollah of disarmament clauses – again, due to the national resistance mantle it claimed – had the effect of blunting international balancing against it.

Case Four: Pakistan and Afghanistan

Pakistan's proxy warfare in Afghanistan achieved success. However, this was because of its broader proxy policy and more deniable support of the Quetta Shura Taliban, not because of the Haqqani network, which was a key strategic liability during the war. Islamabad's approach prevented the emergence of a hostile Afghanistan and gave Pakistan a strong voice in the country's future. It achieved this despite the United States projecting a tremendous amount of military and political power into Afghanistan for nearly two decades. Despite its support for the Haqqani network and its pursuit of divergent strategic goals, Pakistan suffered no significant American repercussions. It was never listed as a state sponsor of terrorism and never received less than $1 billion annually in aid through 2016. This effectiveness was the product of Pakistan's familiarity with proxy warfare, its veteran militants, and the indirect support religious and social institutions gave to militant groups. This support for militancy was a feature of the Pakistani state for decades, since the regime of Zia-ul-Haq. But it also incurred significant costs. The institutions that supported the Haqqanis and other insurgents in Afghanistan also promoted militancy in Pakistan. Pakistan's lack of control over these militants resulted in widespread violence in the FATA and elsewhere when their policy goals diverged, such as during the state's cooperation with US counterterrorism strikes. Pakistani forces themselves then became a target. Pakistan had to use the proxies it did control more closely – primarily the Haqqani network – to mitigate the costs of the more

distantly supported militants through dialogue and mediation. This was the primary value of the Haqqanis.

The Haqqani network was the most operationally capable Afghan militant group and the one most closely supported by the Pakistani state. This aided the group's capability for high-end attacks, including on prestige targets like the US Embassy in 2011. Islamabad offered a mix of both direct and indirect support to the Haqqani network. The group received direct support from the state's security services; for example, Pakistani military and intelligence officers were present in Haqqani training camps and supplied the group with weapons. Pakistani security personnel also reportedly tipped off the Haqqanis when raids by the Americans were imminent, and allowed them free conduct within the Federally Administered Tribal Areas (FATA). They provided financial support, such as an alleged $200,000 to help the Haqqanis enable al-Qaeda's 2009 bombing of a CIA base. Not all the Haqqanis' support was governmental, however. They had independent sources of funding, such as income from smuggling, and also benefited from indirect support by the Pakistani state. Beginning in the 1970's, Pakistan began to funnel significant amounts of money into religious foundations, schools, and charities. This affected many facets of Pakistani public life, not least the military's officer corps, which became far more religious than the bastion of secularism it had been in the past. The number of madrassas, for example, rose from 908 in 1971 and 2,861 in 1988 to over 10,000 today. These schools were integral to inculcating the culture of jihadism that became enmeshed with religiosity and the ideology of Zia-ul-Haq's reign. Some, like the Haqqanis' Mamba al-Ulum school near their stronghold of Miram Shah, provided military instruction to students. Others, like the Red Mosque in Islamabad,

were veritable arsenals. This latter form of support posed a dilemma to potential balancers like the United States in Afghanistan as to how much of its support to Islamic militants was official policy and how much was individual initiative, organic to Pakistani society and the product of ideological shifts decades earlier.

The Haqqanis' links to the Pakistani state were also a weakness, however. The moments Pakistan came closest to being sanctioned by the United States were due to the actions of the Haqqani network. And despite their operational competence, the Haqqanis were not the main body of the insurgency. They were in fact a liability, because their comparative lack of operational deniability for Pakistan attracted strategic US balancing. This deniability was affected at times by other factors. Certainly, the multiple armed conflicts taking place in the FATA lessened the external consequences for conducting cross-border aggression. Pakistan would often blame Afghanistan for sponsoring TTP militants when confronted over its support for the Haqqanis. The use of the Haqqanis during operational offensives also seems to have correlated with reduced Pakistani deniability. American balancing reached its peak when high-profile attacks spiked from mid-2008 to early 2009 and mid-2011 to mid-2012, along with contacts between security officials and Haqqani members. This also represents the period when Pakistan was pressing hardest to sustain its goals against an increased US troop presence. After 2014, when the US presence was declining, there was less conflict between the two states despite no significant improvement in the war.

The degree of ethnic fragmentation along the Afghan frontier also affected Pakistani deniability. The FATA and other Afghan border regions were already highly mixed, with tribes and families scattered across the still-disputed frontier. This made

pinning down clear examples of cross-border violations by proxies more challenging for balancers. The ease of initiating conflict also meant that there was a relatively higher threshold for violations of territorial aggression, which also aided Pakistan's deniability by weakening the norm against interstate aggression. The arbitrariness of the Durand line was also cited by many Pakistani leaders as an excuse for their lack of control. Lastly, in this case, regime changes in Afghanistan and Pakistan may have had an effect on deniability. Afghanistan experienced only one regime change in the course of this case study, and balancing against Pakistan did decline afterwards. Conversely, balancing against Pakistan was highest right before its own periods of regime change, particularly at the end of Musharraf's government, and then leveled off afterwards. This illustrated how despite consistent polices (which were a product of the national security establishment in any case), the new Pakistani government had its slate "wiped clean" in terms of interstate aggression.

Case Five: Saudi Arabia and Chechnya

Saudi Arabia's relationship with the Chechen Salafists was the most tenuous and thus most deniable of the five cases examined here. For decades, Riyadh sponsored Salafism and pan-Islamic ideology through a variety of social institutions like schools, charities, and mosques. They served the goal of propping up the regime's ideological legitimacy first against the Arab secularists and then against the threat of Iran's Islamic revolution. Particularly during the Soviet war in Afghanistan, these institutions also produced militants that projected Saudi geopolitical influence, first against the Soviets and then by radicalizing the societies in which they dwelt. Similar goals were

accomplished in Chechnya. These Salafists were a highly capable force operationally, playing a supporting role in the first war and then a dominant role in the second. During the interim period of Chechnya's independence they successfully imposed their policy goals on the secular Chechen government led by Aslan Maskhadov, leading an initially secular government to adopt their national and eventually transnational aims. During its independence, Chechnya became increasingly Islamic domestically, in custom and in more, with the enthusiastic support of formerly nationalist commanders. The second effect they achieved was the tremendous cost imposed on Russia, nearly sinking Yeltsin's presidency and creating a lasting burr in US-Russian relations. Chechen militancy during and between the wars consistently sapped Russian strength and prestige, a visible reminder of the hollowness of the post-Soviet state. Both of these effects were valuable to Saudi Arabia.

These strategic benefits were also made absurdly on the cheap. The cost to Riyadh was comparatively minor financial support to its domestic institutions, which provided some endogenous benefits anyway in the form of regime legitimacy. Saudi Arabia also endured remarkably little direct international balancing. In Chechnya, balancing against the Salafists did not come from Russia until early 1998 and then from the secular Chechen authorities until late 1998, far too late to prevent the radicalization of the republic. In fact, the Saudi government delayed direct consequences for its policy until 2002, after the exogenous effect of terror attacks in the US increased the pressure on Riyadh to reform its funding mechanisms. This was roughly a decade after Salafist influence first began expanding in the Caucasus. When balancing did occur, it came at the moments large groups of militants crossed state lines, primarily the Buynksk attack in

1997 and the Khattab attack into Dagestan in 1999, but also at Gudermes the year before. These actions (particularly the Khattab raid, which led to the disastrous second war) effectively turned the Saudi style of proxy warfare into a less deniable form of conventional aggression conducted by the Chechens against their neighbor, and was treated as such.

Saudi Arabia's support of the Chechen Salafists came almost entirely through supporting non-state entities like charitable foundations, mosques, and schools. Since the 1960's, Saudi Arabia had seen benefit in sponsoring pan-Islamist organizations such as the Organization of the Islamic Conference and the International Islamic Relief Organization, which provided both domestic legitimacy for the Saudi regime and strategic benefits abroad. These spread Salafist Islam to places like the Caucasus, which altered Chechnya's evolution. In the 1980's, some of these institutions became key pipelines for funneling Saudi militants and funding to the Soviet war in Afghanistan, and then later to battlefields in Tajikstan, Algeria, Bosnia, and elsewhere. In Chechnya, these jihadists were a valuable resource in the country's first war with Russia. While initially nationalist radicals like Shamil Basayev were more valuable to the cause, the Saudi jihadist Khattab and other Afghan Arabs contributed to the victory through both their fighting prowess and their knowledge of more advanced guerilla techniques. They then converted many of the key field commanders during the interregnum.

One factor that affected sponsor deniability less in this case was whether its proxies were used for an offensive or defensive purpose locally. Salafists like Khattab poured into Chechnya to combat the Russians during the first war in what was clearly a defensive role, and incurred effectively no opposition from Russia or other states.

However, they were then used offensively against the Maskhadov government throughout the period of independence, also without incurring any balancing until 1998. Khattab's actions in 1999 then initiated the second Chechen war. But despite even this attack, by far the bulk of international pressure until 2002 was on Russia for the conduct of its war, not on the militants. This suggests that the more remote the proxy's connection to the sponsor, the more offensive goals it could pursue while maintaining strategic deniability.

The relatively clear delineation of the border between Chechnya and Dagestan did contribute to reducing deniability, however. The strongest Russian balancing reaction came during cross-border actions, particularly after Khattab's attack in 1999, when the hundreds of militants crossing the border incurred a reaction that the Salafists' actions in Dagestan to seize Karamakhi and other villages did not. Here, the Salafists' violation of territorial sovereignty was met with immediate and harsh consequences. Salafist influence also rose markedly after the death of Dudayev and the election of Maskhadov. Maskhadov was certainly a weaker leader than Dudayev and had fewer nationalist credentials. But internationally, potential allies were also more uncertain about his administration. His inability to win support against either the Salafists or the Russians (despite harsh international critiques about Russian tactics) hurt his ability to garner external legitimacy and support against the Salafists, and hurt his ability to contest their influence internally.

This weakness was exacerbated by the unclear status of Chechnya resulting from its 1997 agreement with Russia. This murkiness hampered Maskhadov's ability to engage the West, which would leaven its statements of support for the Chechens with

admonitions that the republic was part of the Russian Federation. Since they insisted they were not part of the Russian Federation, of course, Chechen leaders could similarly not receive assistance from Russia to combat the militants. In fact, there was no natural partner to balance the Salafist influence and money that was pouring into Chechnya. While there was no diplomatic agreement that facilitated Saudi Arabia projecting influence in Chechnya, this was perhaps to the Kingdom's benefit. Indeed, avoiding such an agreement would have been at the very core of Saudi Arabia's proxy strategy: such a process would have decreased Saudi deniability to an unacceptable degree. It would have presumed the link between Saudi geopolitical interest in the region and the spread of Salafist Islam, which would expose Riyadh to unacceptable consequences that it managed to defer until 2001.

Lastly, the transnational impact of Saudi institutions and the proxy wars that resulted may have affected the Chechen Salafists in a number of ways. Their participation in other wars like Afghanistan and Tajikistan may have normalized to a certain degree their presence in the Chechen war and settlement (even militant settlement) in places like Karamakhi in Dagestan. But they also linked the Chechen war and indeed Saudi Arabia to other acts committed by Salafists and Afghan Arabs, most disastrously to the terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001.

Future research

This dissertation's hypothesis – that a proxy's effectiveness is more dependent on its sponsor's plausible deniability than its own operational capability – could be strengthened with other cases that do not rely on the United States and its closest

European partners as the balancing powers. Otherwise, it runs the risk of turning this into a dissertation about United States foreign policy and decision-making. The specific exogenous foreign policy interests of the United States also run the risk of distorting the causal links that underpin the analysis. The fifth case here, Chechnya, offsets this design vulnerability somewhat, since the Maskhadov government and the Russian Federation are the balancers. The dissertation would be improved by including cases like India's involvement in the Sri Lankan insurgency or other non-US centered examples. There are obviously more challenges in studying the balancing power's reactions in such examples, especially without experience in the language, since the decision processes of most other governments are less transparent than that of the United States and the local media more inaccessible. In the Chechnya case included here, these impediments were circumvented by using translated local media to report on statements by senior government officials. But this is less reliable than tracking official comments from state capitals, and obviously runs the risk of introducing bias.

This dissertation could also be helped by a large-*n* study. The weaknesses in this study are endemic to any qualitative method: limited case selection, limited control of variables, imprecise measurements. But a quantitative review of the data on intrastate war over the past seventy years would strengthen the qualitative approach. This time period, reflecting the apex of American power during the Cold War and after, would provide the most practical lessons on how states have most successfully used proxies to project power or sustain their influence. Such a study could use data from the Correlates of War dataset, its Uppsala Conflict Data Program/PRIO rival, or somewhere else – there is no shortage of competing civil war databases. To these lists could be added a variable

for the proportion of support to a sponsored proxy that comes (for example) from private sources, whether individuals, charities, or religious foundations. This could be the basic independent variable in a regression. The dependent variable could be the duration and outcome of a conflict, and their relationship could be tested proportionately, to see how the impact of private support on conflict changes as that support rises. The study could also use control variables to hold constant factors like the average income of the host country, the size of its population, level of democracy, terrain, and so forth. In addition, there would have to be divined a variable for the relationship of the state to the private sponsor: surely, for example, there is some empirical difference between Saudi Arabia's support of militants fighting in Afghanistan and the United States' tolerance of Americans assisting Catholic militants in Northern Ireland.

This research would serve two purposes. First, it could help uncover statistically significant trends or correlations of more deniable support with the outcome of the conflict hinted at in this dissertation – for example, the effect of a nearby civil war. Second, it could control for implicit selection biases in the case studies. The cases of indirect support for proxies examined here involve Muslim nations, Pakistan and Saudi Arabia. A large-*n* dataset, however imperfect and even arbitrary in parts, would be an important part of the effort to control for such bias enough to test this dissertation's conclusions about proxies and power projection more robustly.

Additional qualitative cases would also be useful in delving deeper in the indirect support given by Saudi Arabia and other states to various shades of Islamic militants. Parsing out that support and how it has affected conflicts from Tajikistan to Bosnia is of key importance to understanding how it can be successfully employed to achieve the ends

of the sponsor. This is one of the clearest-cut cases of the extreme end of deniability, and thus should be more fully explored, particularly to see what factors increase its utility to the sponsor and which decrease it. In some cases like Bosnia, Saudi foreign policy goals were achieved. In others like Tajikistan, they were not. And these results do not always correspond with whether the local conflict in which the proxy fought was won or lost. Thus, an experimental design study of cases involving Saudi proxy support could be extremely valuable to understanding how indirect support affects different conflicts.

In addition, it could be extremely useful to analyze other cases of proxy support that are even a standard deviation of deniability beyond the support illustrated by the Saudi case. For example, what sort of support does China or Armenia give to the Chinese or Armenian diasporas in places like Malaysia or the United States? These might well have some political effect on the host country, though the sponsor state (if that is even the proper term, at the extreme edge of the proxy-sponsor spectrum) has only limited involvement with its community at all? And what difference does it make if these proxies are not actively involved in conflict, but nonetheless pose a latent threat *to* conflict, if their or the state's policy goals are transgressed too egregiously? They are still a potential means of exerting influence on a target and shaping a potential battlefield, even though the shade of violence is very far distant. There is thus a gap on the effectiveness (not to say categorization) of agents of influence in the space between distantly-supported proxy and reliable ethnic voting bloc. Additional research on the pre-conflict use of proxies by even more remote sponsors would be valuable.

In a broader sense, the use of proxies to spread revisionist states' influence points to a network-centric theory of the balance of power. In systems where territorial

annexation is punished, the balance of power (in terms of spheres of influence in the international system) might be best illustrated and determined by competing cross-border networks. In some areas, that means proxy militants. Changes to the balance happen among these networks on the ground, like the capabilities of the Chechens in the interwar years being improved (or at least changed) by the Afghan Arabs, who cut across many state boundaries. In other areas like the modern French-German border, that means economic proxies. What sort of proxy relationship does Deutsche Bank have with Berlin? Why is it more effective for Berlin to support Deutsche Bank, which is surely in some way an agent of its influence, and not ethnic Germans from the diaspora? When does it become less effective, and why?

These questions suggest another avenue to be explored is measuring which kind of network competition predominates under which conditions. At certain borders, like those of France and Germany or the United States and Canada, such networks could be less-security-centric and spheres of influence determined through non-military means like economic relationships. In these static areas, states project power through non-military networks such as trade and elite relationships to expand their spheres of influence. In other areas, however, networks are focused on security: proxy forces, like insurgents, militias, jihadis, or some secular equivalent. In either place, the states that manipulate these proxy networks the most effectively might establish long-term dominance regardless of the type of network. Comparing the usefulness of militarized networks to expand states' influence versus non-militarized networks would also be valuable.

Practical implications and recommendations

This dissertation has examined how states are conducting proxy warfare most effectively. In doing so it has taken issue with the arguments put forth by other proxy war scholars like Geraint Hughes that proxy war is fundamentally harmful to state interests in the long run. On the contrary: a properly supported proxy can be an effective agent of influence for states, given sufficient deniability.

This is more than an academic question. The use of proxy war is likely to become more pressing as the international system continues its drift from near-unipolarity to something much more diffuse. It is common to note other power centers emerging in the world: Russia, basically recovered from its post-Soviet nadir and slowly worming its way out of sanctions; India, confronted with a more aggressive China and looking to rethink some of its old strategic shibboleths; German-led Europe, instinctually tacking if not towards neutrality than to a third way with China and Russia; and always, always, the mismatch of power in the Persian Gulf between Iran and a constellation of Sunni Gulf states that require constant US tending. But it is the rapid growth in China's power that threatens to reshape conflict over the next decades, as the United States' relative edge – not least in conventional military superiority – continues to ebb. China will push at its borders, not just militarily but politically and economically. Beijing's signature Belt and Road Initiative has sunk vast sums of money into regional and extra-regional states with political influence as a corollary to boot.

This dissertation is most valuable for those regional states that are opposed to Chinese dominance and looking for other tools to counter Beijing's influence. States like Vietnam, India, and even Russia will be forced to contend with the choice of acceding to

Chinese desires or contesting them, and finding themselves more isolated and more threatened. How to do so most effectively is of the utmost importance, especially since many of the factors that discouraged conventional warfare in the last half of the twentieth century remain in place, like the proliferation of nuclear weapons and a growing norm against interstate war.

Perhaps nowhere in the modern world is there more a microcosm of these conflicts evident than in the case of countries that harbor Shia militants, particularly the failed states of the Shia Arab world where Iranian militant proxies often hold dominant sway over their hollowed-out states. The state-within-a-state feature is now a feature of Lebanon and Iraq. When the Yemen war is concluded it may well look similar. The ability of Iran and Hezbollah (and Iran and parts of the Popular Mobilization Forces, or PMF, in Iraq) to obtain deniability for their war against other domestic factions comes through their proxies' linked wars against a second enemy (Israel in the case of Hezbollah, ISIS in the case of the PMF). These related proxy wars excuse – enough – the significant Iranian military presence in those countries and their maintenance of a parallel security state, which the US is left trying to prop up what could be generously called the shell state. Based on the deniability Iran has achieved in Lebanon, balancing powers will likely not be effective countering its influence from the top-down through aid to the Lebanese government. Building up a state is far more costly than tearing it down. A regional competitor like Saudi Arabia should focus on its own proxies within a state, like the Sunni communities in Lebanon, which would likely be far more effective in toto than supporting the target governments even if this risks more instability in the short run. Sub-optimal outcomes for the country, in other words, should be acceptable, if they

permit balancing against militants more cheaply and effectively (and the bar is not high here) than direct support to the state government. Overall suboptimal outcomes may still have a higher benefit than the status quo in the one axis of counter-Iran (or counter-whoever) influence, and should be pursued as such. This may have a spillover effect. In places like Lebanon, Hezbollah's weapons are its trump card in the sectarian balance, its ability to prevent a different strategic outcome from emerging. Paradoxically, in cases like this, if status quo countries themselves sought to overturn the balance of power through asymmetric proxy warfare, and not always be on the receiving end, they might wind up creating a more sustainable equilibrium.

This raises the important question of ideology. The state ideologies of Saudi Arabia, Iran, Pakistan, and Russia are all explicitly based around ethnicity and religion, and are all easily translated into support for ethnic or religious compatriots abroad. In addition to the exogenous ideological benefit that this provided to both sponsor and proxy, there were strategic benefits and strategic requirements. Ideology was not ecumenical: it helped set certain strategic goals, like empowering revolutionary Shia communities with Iran. The pre-identification of ideologically simpatico populations also helped Pakistan, Iran, and Saudi Arabia build institutional pathways to transfer support to their proxies. Almost certainly, that made them more effective fighting forces. In the case of Pakistan and especially Iran, it kept them closely hewn to Iran's strategic goals. The proxy that remained closest to its sponsors' goals were the Russian proxies in Ukraine and Georgia, but they required constant tending by the Russian government and so Moscow suffered a strategic cost in terms of deniability. Changes in the current global political trends from democracy towards different kinds of authoritarianism make it more

likely that states will seek to activate outlying members of their national ethnic groups as weapons. Particularly since the borders of state control in many places do not match up neatly with national populations. It is a practical question how states that are not based around a specific ethnic or sectarian group could sufficiently incentivize civil society in foreign countries to mobilize against their government. It should be pointed out, however, that both the United States and (especially) the Soviet Union supported proxy groups during the Cold War. In the Soviet case, the mobilizing ideological factor was an economic theory rather than Russian-ness or religion. A migration away from liberal democracy, therefore, is likely to increase the prevalence of proxy warfare.

Perhaps this is not necessarily a bad thing for the cause of peace. In a traditional great power manner, the global maintenance of the status quo and the reinforcement of the norm of territorial non-aggression across the board are far too costly for one power to do alone. Indeed, an entire subfield of international relations is built around the inevitable rise and fall of hegemons. How to short-circuit this cycle? If revisionist states are willing to upset the status quo and wage proxy war beneath the level of armed conflict, balancing powers should look for ways to do the same against them – especially smaller regional balancing powers, like Vietnam. Until the sponsor states incur some similar cost for their actions, they will not contribute to the upholding of global order. In fact, upholders of the current status quo should counterintuitively be on offense as much as possible, always projecting power through proxies to balance the power projected by others. If Pakistan were busier with Afghan-supported insurgents in Baluchistan, perhaps it would have less ability to support proxies in Afghanistan. Ditto for Russia and the Tatars. Ditto for Iran and the Azeris. Of course, there would be a host of legal issues this

would raise, which are more problematic in democratic states than in authoritarian ones. With such a policy, human rights violations are almost inevitable given the broader left and right limits that support to a proxy implies, particularly as the support grows more deniable and thus more tenuous. In these cases, however, the recipients are also often more organic to an area's human terrain and thus more effective against enemy insurgents and (usually) proxy forces. The looser governmental touch which permits their organic link to the population would also make them more effective agents to project power. Given sufficient deniability, the sponsor could perhaps mitigate international strategic fallout.

And of course perhaps not. Perhaps the more the world delegates violence to proxies, the easier it would be to break the norm against interstate aggression and the more violent the world would become. But as a rule people and entities do not alter their behavior until their costs begin to outweigh the benefits. Given the immense benefit of deniable proxy warfare, at very low cost, they are not yet at that point.